

ZAYDEN STONE

MYTHICAL CREATURES AND MAGICAL BEASTS

An Illustrated Book of Monsters from
Timeless Folktales, Folklore and Mythology

VOLUME 1



LEGENDARY LORES

MYTHICAL CREATURES & MAGICAL BEASTS

*An Illustrated Book of Monsters from Timeless
Folktales, Folklore and Mythology: Volume 1*

Zayden Stone
The Legendary Lores Series

Spent Pens Publications

A Summary

Have you ever been curious about the creatures often mentioned in passing in mythologies or in the books you read; or about the magical beasts you see in movies referencing folklore?

Whether it is the three headed guard dog Fluffy in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, or even the story of Smaug in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth in *The Hobbit*, these magical creatures have a deep connection to the mythologies and folktales of ancient cultures.

This book is an attempt to tell their stories. Where did they come from? What relevance do they serve in mythology? Why are some so obscure, while others become pop-culture enigmas?

Dive deep into their stories retold by Zayden Stone, and re-imagined by artist,

About the Author

Zayden Stone is a self proclaimed folklorist. As a child, while he watched his friends play with action figurines, he was swallowed up by the world of mythology. He let the stories of ancient cultures transport him to imaginary worlds where magical beasts roamed the planet freely. He would often re-imagine these stories told from the perspective of these mythical creatures and would wonder what they would have had to say.

It has been a life long dream of Stone's to combine all the creatures that he has grown up reading about, into a comprehensive illustrated guide for others to learn from. This book is an ode to his own childhood fascination for ancient tales.

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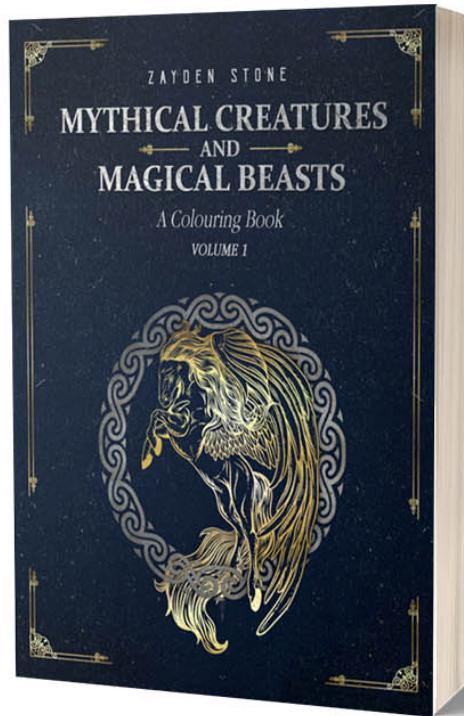
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*To all those who are still fascinated by the timeless tales of folklore and myth, I
dedicate this book to your ever-curious and wide-eyed souls.*

- Zayden Stone

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Introduction

At the heart of every myth, folktale, or legend is excellent storytelling. For tales to survive for centuries by word of mouth, they must be compelling with captivating characters, events, and messages. A host of creatures populate these tales; some heroes in their own right and many that are monstrous. This book includes a wide range of creatures from myth, folktales, and legends.

Mythology is a composite word of two Greek words: *mythos* roughly meaning 'story' and *logos* meaning 'spoken.' But more than just a spoken story, mythology involves a link to the divine. Greek mythology, for example, are either about the pantheon of gods or their offspring. The heroes of Greek mythology are usually the child of a god, receiving divine assistance, and the monsters also often have divine parentage. The same can be said for Hindu mythology, where there are an array of divine beings and their offspring, and gods can take the form of different creatures. For example, the giant kite from Hindu mythology, Garuda, was born to a divine being: his mother was the mother of all birds and herself born of gods. Garuda is also the mount of the Hindu god Vishnu, so Garuda is clearly part of mythology.

Folklore, in contrast to mythology, is more secular than sacred. It can be thought of as the body of traditional customs and beliefs preserved by storytelling. The stories often illustrate a particular message but without the spiritual element that myths have. For example, Adarna, a magical bird from Filipino folklore, has supernatural powers but is not linked to any gods and the other characters in the folktale are human rather than divine. Neither is it tethered to any particular historical event or real person; therefore, it is folklore.

Legends, in contrast, have a historical link, although the fantastical elements of the story are not historically verifiable. Like folklore, legends usually have a supernatural element and are about humans instead of gods and their offspring. However, legends can be linked to a real person or an actual event. For example, the metal-loving Alicanto from Chilean legend is a supernatural bird linked to Juan Godoy and the 1832 Chilean silver rush.

The mythological beasts in this book are from different cultures and different ages in history. I have always been interested in fantastical creatures and monsters and each creature in this book, however obscure, has been carefully chosen and researched. Original sources have been hunted down where possible and available information has been critically analyzed to piece together an accurate and interesting picture. The creatures and their stories often change over time; this is a natural part of how stories and their characters evolve to remain relevant to the people telling them.

Each creature has its own illustration and begins with a fictional narrative. The creature's appearance and characteristics follow to compliment the illustration and then a retelling of its story, or one of the stories it features in. There is also an analysis of its interpretations and what the creature symbolizes.

The mythical beasts are presented in categories that have been specifically chosen as they are consistent across different cultures and periods in history. The categories are arthropods for insects, crustaceans, and arachnids; avian for birds; canines for wolves and dogs; serpents for snakes, including water snakes; ungulates for hooved animals like horses and cows; and aquatic for water dwellers such as whales. Creatures in a section may be in the form of that animal, hybrids of that animal, or able to shapeshift from or into that animal. Presenting the creatures in categories makes it easier to see what themes and messages

the creatures from different cultures and ages have in common. You will find some overlapping themes across different cultures that point to universal ideas in how humans perceive the animal.

If you wonder where your favorite creature is, you will probably find something of them within these pages, even if they do not have their own chapter. For example, the ever-popular Pegasus can be found in the tale of the Gorgon sisters. He also had a half-brother, Arion, who features in the ungulates section, and there is a brilliant white-winged horse from Islamic tradition which may sound very familiar to Pegasus as well, helping you draw in more parallels to stories told across cultures.

The messages these mythological enigmas convey are often about explaining natural phenomena, aspects of human behavior, or teachings about the behavior of animals, something vital for survival in ancient times. Myth, folklore, and legend essentially provided a way for people to understand and cope with the world and extract some semblance of order and meaning from what could otherwise be overwhelmingly chaotic and dangerous. Just imagine trying to explain hunters going out never to return, death by snake bites, or lunar eclipses, without any scientific knowledge.

The body of myths, lore, and legends from a culture gives insight into what that culture valued. It also shows what was dangerous in terms of certain animals or aspects of nature. For example, Inuit mythology emphasizes physical strength and understanding the behavior of animals because this could mean the difference between life and death in the harsh environment.

As humans built civilizations that lessened the chance of indiscriminate death by animals, myths and folktales—and their associated creatures—became more about living a virtuous life and avoiding suffering and misery. Many myths perpetuated the patriarchal society they were a product of, particularly evident in written accounts from Ancient Greece. For example, taming

animalistic desires, like lust, is often portrayed as virtuous, and this is shown in lots of hybrid creatures that lure men with their appearance of beauty.

Sometimes the beasts are heroes in their own right, such as the self-sacrificing bird Jatayu from Hindu mythology. Sometimes they are horrifying, like Typhon from Greek mythology, to make the gods look good when they defeat them. Because for any exciting story, the heroes need worthy opponents. After all, what would Hercules be without a fearsome hoard of monsters to overcome?

In ancient times, storytelling provided entertainment as well as practical and moral education. Common themes that can be found are explaining the unknown, cautionary tales that warn against dangers, explaining moral values, and spiritual messages to give a sense of hope and purpose. But if these stories were not entertaining and able to keep listeners captivated, they would have been forgotten long ago, well before any were ever written down. Instead, the stories live on, and their creatures are remembered, ready to be retold again and again. These stories, and innumerable others like them, were told when the sky grew dark, tribes and families sat together and shared a magical world to educate and entertain.

Section One | Arthropoda

Arthropods play many roles in human culture, especially in folklores, mythology and religions. Many of these aspects include insects that are important both economically and symbolically, right from the modern day honey bees to the scarabs of Ancient Egypt.

Arthropods with cultural significance include crustaceans such as lobsters, which are popular subjects in art; and arachnids such as scorpions and spiders, whose venom have medical applications.

Spiders have been depicted in ancient mythologies, religions and arts for centuries. They are often portrayed as mischievous due to their venomous bite, but can be seen as symbols of power since they produce webs that wait for prey.

For example, Tarantella is an Italian folk dance that is said to remove the poison from those who have been bitten by the tarantula wolf spider, *lycosa*. The dance itself dates to the fifteenth century and was once considered a cure called tarantism, which was caused by a spider bite. The Moche people had a fascination with spiderwebs, often putting them in their art and depicting spiders as prominent figures in their culture.

The scorpion appeared as the astrological sign Scorpio in 600 BC, when Babylonian astronomers created the twelve signs of the Zodiac. In South Africa, the Scorpion has a significant cultural meaning and its motif appears in art and culture extensively.

The Scorpion was seen as an embodiment of both good and evil. For example, to counteract the power of the scorpion,

ancient Egyptians worshipped Serket as a goddess that protected Pharaohs from the powers of evil. But you will find scorpion details woven into Turkish Kilim flat weave carpets as protection to ward off evil forces.

Chapter 1: Arachne

Origin: GREEK Mythology



All eight of her eyes narrowed on to her prey and he approached the glistening weave of threads she had spun. She hisses; her forked tongue tasting the scent of him in the air. She is proud - she knows not one prey can ever escape the strength of her weave. Once trapped, her prey will only be spun further and more furiously into a cocoon of her embroidery, where he will await his fate - to become a meal.

This is the tale of Arachne; Greek mythology's first spider. But Arachne was not born a spider. Arachne's story begins as a beautiful woman with long black hair and pale skin; a woman who grew up at the foot of a loom to become one of the greatest weavers of all time.

The daughter of a tradesman, who was known to dye the deepest shades of purple cloth, Arachne was no stranger to the world of fabrics. She was said to be born of a spindle that her mother, the nymph Ida, spun from oak and plum with Athena's blessing. It is indeed ironic that the very Goddess that blessed the birth of Arachne was the one that called for her end.

Arachne's villagers would often flock to see Arachne's work. They were all in awe of the fine tapestries that she created. They would watch as she created flowing fabrics, as if thread would grow directly from her fingertips. Praise for her work continued, but it all came at a cost.

Arachne grew more proud by the day of her talents and would often publicly shun the idea that her gift was one from the Gods. She would often go as far as to claim that her artistry was beyond anyone else's, whether a mortal's or even a God's.

It was only a matter of time before Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom would come to hear of Arachne's claims. Once she did, she chose to teach Arachne a lesson.

One fine day, as Arachne continued to weave in public, surrounded by her admirers, Athena disguised herself as an old woman and approached Arachne to remind her to be thankful for the gift that the Gods have anointed upon her. Arachne scoffed. Without even looking up, she berated the old woman and declared that no Goddess can have the talent that she has, so how would they even gift such a skill to any mortal. Arachne continued to claim her talent was inborn and unmatched by any other.

At this point, Athena was irked and revealed her true self. She challenged Arachne to a weaving duel for continuing to defame the Gods. Even at this point, Arachne had too much pride to accept that she had erred, and instead accepted the challenge. Three days is what Athena gave Arachne to prepare, and as the third day dawned, Athena appeared, as the crowds gathered.

Different Greek myths have different angles to this part of the story. While some claim that Zeus was called to judge the competition, others claim that Athena called upon nymphs to decide who the greater weaver was. Regardless of who judged the challenge, the story continued something like this:

Athena drew strands of grass, puffs of clouds, and all the colours from the flowers nearby, to weave a tapestry that showed the Gods in all their power - Poseidon riding the waves, Zeus firing thunderbolts, Apollo speeding across the skies. Athena was illustrating the might of the Gods and how their lives dwarfed over mortal life. On the flip side, Arachne continued to mock the Gods even in her weaving. Through her intertwined threads she depicted Zeus as a philanderer who shape shifts to ensnare women. Arachne showed no fear in depicting Zeus in the most unflattering of ways.

The tale of Arachne's transformation begins here, and different Greek mythologies tell them differently. While most of

the tales show that Arachne's tapestry was in fact superior to that of Athena's, which raised a fiery temper within the Goddess, some tales show that Arachne was finally shown that she cannot out do the Gods. In those stories, Arachne is shown to have become humbled after the challenge, but sadly, one of the conditions of the challenge was that, should Arachne lose, she will have to give up the loom for her entire life. Upon losing, not only was Arachne taught a lesson in humility, but she grew extremely depressed at learning she will never be allowed to practice her craft again. As a show of the Gods' mercifulness, Athena decides to turn Arachne into a creature whose livelihood depends on its ability to weave. Athena told Arachne that she will show pity on her and allow her to continue to weave, and before Arachne could even rejoice at the idea or conjure in her mind what tricks the Goddess may be up to, Athena began to transform her.

Arachne could feel her body contorting, multiple eyes grew on her face, legs emerged from the side of her body, and thorny black hair sprouted all over her body. As a final touch, Athena left her with a single spool of thread that unwinded from her torso.

In other Greek tales, where Arachne had in fact won the competition, it was Athena's rage that made her tear up Arachne's tapestry and break her loom and turn her into a hideous creature with multiple legs and eyes. Athena apparently left that spool of thread to remind Arachne of her human talent. For centuries that followed, Arachne and her offspring now knew how to weave webs from the threads that emerged from their bellies, as if to taunt the Goddess Athena, that even without human form, they continue to weave, and perhaps still better than what the Gods can do.

Chapter 2: Tsuchigumo

Origin: JAPANESE Mythology



He narrowed down on his next prey. Yet another wanderer who strayed into the vast countryside and the remote fields. The creature could wait no longer; he had hungered for flesh for days. But he was patient, sure this prey would be his for the taking. After all, all the travelers always noticed the cave and saw it as a great place to take respite for the night - protecting them from nature's forces. As this new traveler made his way to the cave, the creature was preparing his deadly snare. Little did the traveller know that he was going to be number 1,990.

This is the tale of Tsuchigumo; Japanese mythology's spider creature from their demonology tales. Tsuchigumo are crawling apparitions in Japanese mythology that dwell in the mountains and forests, weaving their silk tubes along which they wait to ambush prey. Tsuchigumo rely on deception like other yōkai do, but what makes them unique is their spider-like behaviour.

The Tsuchigumo appears in the legend of Minamoto no Yorimitsu, who served the regents of the Fujiwara clan in Japan. He was known to take violent measures that the Fujiwara would themselves shy away from. He is one of the earliest Japanese legends of historical note for his military exploits.

He was a part of many stories and lore, some true, and some dramatized for effect. His mythological story starts when he fell ill during one of his quests for a giant demon skull. A mysterious priest named Tsuchigumo no Seijitsua would show up each night to medicate him to cure him of this illness. Many moons passed, but Minamoto no Yorimitsu was not healing. One of Yorimitsu's retainers, Kinmon Goro Munezo, grew suspicious of this nightly visitor, and was one day able to reveal his true identity by revealing Tsuchigumo no Seijitsua's true reflection in a mirror. Yorimitsu grew alarmed when he saw a grotesque spider-like creature, and tried to slash the demon in half.

The Tsuchigumo managed to escape, but he left behind a trail of blood that led Yorimitsu and his retainers right into Tsuchigumo's lair. There Yorimitsu found that the spider-demon had slithered into a hole and sent its children out. This was when Yorimitsu became aware of how truly dangerous Tsuchigumo was. After failing to find any more traces of the demon's presence, Yorimitsu had to take one of his retainers as a hostage and slit his throat to lure the Tsuchigumo out. This is when the spider demon was slaughtered using the *Kumokirimaru* and thousands of spiderlings fled from its belly. Yorimitsu's sword was thereafter known as the "Spider Cutter".

In another legend, a tsuchigumo took the form of a beautiful warrior woman and led an army of yōkai against Japan. With knowledge of magic and experience in combat, Yorimitsu's first attack was a strike to the tsuchigumo directly.

The direct blow to the warrior women, lifted the illusion she had cast. Her army was not real, and disappeared into a ball of smoke, blinding Yorimitsu's army temporarily and giving her time to escape.

Slithering up the mountain to an opening hidden among natural spider webs, the tsuchigumo thought it was safe. However, the army of Yorimitsu tracked her down with the trail of blood it had left behind from the first blow cast by Yorimitsu. His army entered into battle against its mistress once she was found; found as a giant spider demon! Yorimitsu sliced her abdomen open with a single swing of the sword. To his shock, a thousand baby spiders swarmed out of her belly, but Yorimitsu and his retainers managed to kill every last one before returning as victors.

In ancient Japan, tsuchigumo was used as a derogatory term against aborigines who did not show loyalty to the emperor of Japan. There is some debate on whether the mythological

spider-demon or the historical clans came first. Tsuchigumo may have been an obscure myth, but it was soon picked as the preferred term to label a more humble threat to the empire.

Alternately, the word tsuchigumo has been identified as a derivation of an older derogatory term, tuchigomori, which roughly translates as '*those who hide in the ground*'.

Many of the rural clans' common practices included utilizing existing cave systems and creating fortified hollow earthen mounds for both living and military purposes. This furthers the idea that the use of the label for renegade clans began essentially as a pun, and over time turned into tales of an intelligent race of, occasionally anthropomorphic, spiders.

Chapter 3: Myrmidons

Origin: GREEK Mythology



The sickness spread through the entire island like wildfire; not one villager spared, not one beast tolerant to the disease. As the days passed, the skin began to melt off the bodies of the islanders that didn't die instantly from Hera's curse. The entire island began to reek of the stench of decomposing human and creature flesh alike. Within weeks, Hera's act of jealousy was complete. Her plague had destroyed all life forms on the island, or so she had thought. When Zeus tread on the island to see the havoc Hera had caused, he noticed the ants of the island - still toiling away and growing their cities, unaffected by the cure of the plague. Immediately Zeus cast a spell upon the ants. Before his eyes, he saw these tiny creatures morph. Their bodies grew bigger at first, their limbs collapsing down to four. Their pincers transformed into a set of human lips, their abdomen reshaped into a human torso. Before Zeus could rejoice at his glory, an entire army stood before him - a new race of people.

These are the Myrmidons; legendary inhabitants of Thessaly in Greece. They were known for their fierce devotion to Achilles, the king who led them in the Trojan War. Known for their brute strength and the possession of hive mentality-like strategies in battle, they were known to be defeatable only if their leader was to fall. Historically, the only real army to come close to this sort of tenacity were the Spartans. One must wonder if the fictional writings of an author can directly influence the development of an entire army, or is there perhaps any truth to this mythological army of any-men? Did Greek authors in fact draw from observation and not their imaginations? In fact it is well known that the battle strategies of the Spartans, where soldiers huddle close together to create a strong wall that not only protects each other but almost acts as a battering ram heading towards the enemy, was finessed and mastered by the Romans. And to think this all began from an epic tale like the Iliad or within an infamous Greek Poem, Work and Days.

The word "Myrmidon" is a combination of two Greek words: *myrmex*, meaning "ant", and *demos*, meaning "a person or people". Myrmidons are referenced in many Greek stories. One of them is by Hesiod in his poem *Works and Days*.

Hesiod advises an honest working life which is the source of all good. He feels that both gods and men despise those who are not hardworking enough to work. This is why Hesiod must have taken an interest in the myth of Myrmidons. He showed them as human beings who labored underground for gold that was guarded over by ants.

In Homer's tale of Iliad, the Myrmidons are the soldiers commanded by Achilles. Their ancestor was Myrmidon, who was a son of Zeus and Eurymedous, a princess of Phthiotis. She was known to have been seduced by him in the form of an ant. Essentially Homer's version is an etiological myth, explaining the origin of the Myrmidons by expanding upon their supposed etymology. The name in Classical Greek was interpreted as "ant-people", from *murmekes*, which was first mentioned by Ovid in Metamorphoses. In Ovid's telling of the tales of the Myrmidons, he claimed them to be simple worker ants on the island of Aegina.

The origin of the Myrmidons seems to have been connected to an act of jealousy in other Greek tales. Hera, the queen of the gods, had sent a plague to kill all the human inhabitants of Aegina because the island was named after one of the lovers of Zeus. The ants of the island were unaffected by the sickness, so Zeus responded to Hera's act of jealousy by transforming the surviving ants into a race of people, the Myrmidons. They were as fierce and hardy as ants, and intensely loyal to their leader. Because of their antly origins, they wore brown armour.

Here is a fun fact that not only did Ancient Greek get wrong, but so do modern day pop culture enthusiasts. Ants are mostly female. Males that exist within an ant colony live for a very short

period and only to serve the queen ant. Imagine if Hollywood was to take this societal norm amongst the ants into consideration. Perhaps we would have seen a very different Myrmidon army that was led by Achilles in the movie Troy.

Section Two | An Ancient Aviary

Myths claim birds are magical, and that they speak to us. We heed their advice – they warn us of impending doom or great joys to come. In some cultures, the bird is a symbol for souls that have passed on.

It is said that the mythologies of many ancient cultures speak of birds as a sacred animal. From the classic raven to the chirping sparrow, there is something for everyone. However, some cultures hold more passion than others when it comes to their favourite winged creatures.

For example, in Egyptian mythology, the goddess who can be seen with an ostrich feather while she sits on top of a lotus flower; that's Isis. She was often depicted as sitting or standing among various animals including birds like geese and ducks because. Her son Horus was also considered an avian deity.

It was said that the gods of every nation were simply a different version of the same god. This idea is exemplified by many cultures' avian creatures, who all share similar characteristics. In Scandinavia, there are three sisters called 'the swan maidens' who can transform into swans and deliver messages to their loved ones from time to time. In Sumerian mythology, Utu is portrayed as a bird with two sets of wings – an outer wing and an inner wing representing the sun or daytime sky. Sometimes Utu was depicted with four wings instead of two, suggesting he may be related to heavenly birds like Anzu.

Knecht Ruprecht, the German Santa-like figure, is often shown riding a white horse and accompanied by roosters. The Norse god Odin was depicted with two ravens on his shoulders. In Hinduism, Garuda is said to be half man and half bird that

serves as Lord Vishnu's mount and carries him across the Milky Ocean. Moreover in Burmese mythology, there are four guardian birds: peacocks (representing Buddhism), lions (representing Hinduism), dragons (representing Islam) and tigers representing Burma's indigenous animist religion of Theravada Buddhism. The list goes on.

Chapter 4: Adarna

Origin: FILIPINO FOLKLORE



Maya limped on into the deepest part of the forest. She hadn't told anyone she was coming; they would have said it was too far, too risky, and that the old stories weren't true anyway. Her leg, twisted since birth, gave her an uneven gait and made her joints ache intolerably every day, so this journey was fueled by determination. She was heading for the white tree where a magical bird was said to roost, she knew where the tree was, and she desperately wanted to be free of her pain. As she hobbled along the overgrown path, she herself began to question whether the rumors were true, could this colorful bird really heal her? If she could get there in time and hide quietly, the bird should come to roost at dusk, and she would see for herself—if it even existed.

Maya stumbled upon the white tree sooner than she expected and hurriedly hid behind a bush. Ensuring she had a view of the tree, she prepared to wait. But as she did so, she saw that the bird was already there, so still she hadn't noticed it before. At least part of what she had heard was true: it really was the most beautiful rainbow colors. She came out from behind the bush as the bird turned its head slowly and looked directly at her. She couldn't believe she had found it. The Adarna opened its beak and began to sing.

One of the most well-known folktales in the Philippines is the story of the Adarna, a multicolored bird with seven magical songs. The story is thought to have originally been an indigenous tale, though it had picked up some European influences by the time it was written down in the 16th Century as the epic poem *Ibong Adarna*, literally meaning the Adarna bird.

Deep in the forests of the Philippines lives an endemic species of trogon (*Harpactes ardens*), which is nicknamed the Ibong Adarna because of its beautiful colors. Though the Philippine trogon got its nickname from folklore, the folktale itself was likely inspired by the stunning Philippine trogon. Its Latin species name, *ardens*, means 'flaming,' referring to its brilliant colors. Males are the most colorful, with bright red, pink, purple,

blue, and golden brown plumage with black and white patterned wings and a bright yellow beak; they really do fit the description. They are shy and elusive birds that hide in the darkest parts of the forest, just like in the folklore, but as far as anyone knows, their song is not nearly as melodic.

King Ferdinand of Barbania had three sons, Pedro, Diego, and Juan. The King was fondest of his youngest son, Juan, and his brothers were very jealous. One night, the King dreamt his eldest two sons tried to kill Juan, and he became anxious and depressed.

When the King did not recover, he was advised that only the song of the Adarna bird could cure him, so he sent his eldest son, Pedro, to capture it and bring it to him. Pedro found the bird, but it lulled him to sleep with a song and turned him to stone by defecating on him. When Pedro did not return, the King sent his next son, Diego, but the same fate befell him. After a long wait, the King reluctantly sent his beloved Juan to find the Adarna bird.

On the way, Juan happened to pass an old hermit; his brothers had been rude to the hermit when they passed him. The hermit was impressed with Juan's good manners and character and decided to help him. According to the hermit's advice, Juan rubbed lemon juice into cuts in his skin so he would not fall asleep when the Adarna sang. He dodged getting turned to stone, and when the bird fell asleep after its seventh song, Juan fastened a golden thread the hermit had given him around the bird's foot. He rescued his brothers by pouring water on them, and they set off home together.

However, the older brothers were even more jealous of Juan; already the King's favorite, he had achieved what they could not. So, to claim the glory for themselves, they took the bird, beat Juan, and left him in the road. When they returned home, they told the King that they had captured the bird, but the bird would not sing without its true captor present.

Meanwhile, Juan had been found and healed by the helpful hermit and soon returned home, at which point the bird began to sing. Its first song cured the King of his malady and the second song apprised him of the truth. The distraught King was about to order his two treacherous sons to be put to death, but Juan begged that they be banished instead. With the elder brothers gone, peace and merriment returned to the kingdom, for now.

The journey to find the Adarna bird reveals the characters' intentions, strengths, and flaws, and the folktale highlights the value of moral fiber. Undergoing challenging ordeals gives people the opportunity to show their true colors, and the Adarna bird is the means by which people get what they deserve.

Three of the seven magical songs are included in the folktale: sleep, truth, and healing. Maybe someone deserving, under the right tree in the depths of a Philippine forest, might get to hear what the remaining songs are.

Chapter 5: Alkonost

Origin:SLAVIC Mythology



The calm of the sea made them weary. A silence like this was unheard of in these seas. And then they all heard it; the most melodious of tunes the sailors had ever heard. Some were almost instantly willed into a deep slumber; falling where they stood. Others were so mesmerized by the sounds, that they forgot about the deep abyss that lay beneath.

As the melodies continued, ripples began to show on the surface of the water, soon turning into waves. The noise the waves made as they collided with their ship's hulls was a sound that brought them comfort; it reminded them of home, and the people who awaited for their return.

While the familiar would offer comfort on any other day, what was to follow was something they had only heard of in lore. Suddenly a piercing sound rang through the ears of all those gathered on deck; it was the sound of eggs cracking. Confused at first, the sailors soon understood what had taken place. The eggs of the great Alkonost had hatched on the bed of the sea. They knew it was only a matter of time before the watery depths of hell would engulf them. Lightning cut the skies in half and a thunderous noise followed. Waves in the distance grew taller by the second. Their ship was now surrounded by tall waves.

The sailors realized they had the misfortune of trying to traverse the seas, when the Alkonost's eggs were ready to birth.

The Alkonost is a mythical creature that was said to have been born out of the clash of lightning and thunder. It appears as a bird with the body of a woman, but unlike other avian creatures its wings are mere feathers instead of being made from skin like most birds. She is known to have a melodious voice that can even hypnotise the deaf. She is able to immobilize her prey to

the point where all they can hear are her delightful memories, with all other sounds fading away.

The origins of mythological creatures are uncertain, but scholars believe some may be based on the Greek mythology. The Alkonost was said to have come from a Greek kingfisher named Alcyone who was transformed into a creature-like being and renamed "Alkonost" after the mountain she lived in. The Alkonost is also said to be comparable to the Greek Sirens by virtue of their spellbinding vocal skills, and their half bird, half woman appearance. While the sirens were half women-half fish creatures, they too lured sailors into the depths of their water abode through enchanting music and voices.

It's said that this creature will appear before someone is about to die or when there is great calamity in store for them- this accounts for why you might occasionally see it circling around at night during storms. But she is also the one who creates these storms. How you wonder? Well it is said that the Alkonost lays her eggs on a beach and then rolls them into the sea. When the Alkonost's eggs hatch, a thunderstorm sets in and the sea becomes so rough that it becomes impossible to traverse.

The Alkonost is a mythological beast that lives with her counterpart, the Sirin. They were once both considered to be birds of good fortune and regarded as protective spirits. The Alkonost guarded good fortune during the day, while the Sirin protected it at night. Russians carved their likeness on the entrance to their homes as a form of protection from bad spirits. Over time they became more well-known for their dual personalities; one being good, and the other with darker characteristics similar to Sirens in Greek mythology (though this idea changed over time). The Alkonost is seen as good, while the Sirin has been associated with darker qualities. Some accounts say that the Alkonost, or 'cast-off spirit,' would fly from one holy being to another as a way of gradually assuring their

souls heaven. Meanwhile, the Sirin was seen as a swiftly moving, alluring creature singing songs to attract humans and then steal them away with sudden death.

Known to live on the magical island of Buyan, the Alkonost resembles a bird with scales, feathers and wings made of ice. The tale goes that the first Alkonosts were created by a powerful wizard who wanted to be able to stay warm during the winter season while he was living in his homeland.

The wizard went out into his garden one day when it became unbearably cold outside and decided to cast some magic on his last remaining plant - an apple tree. He breathed onto its branches and chanted until there was steam coming off them like breath on a foggy window pane. All at once, every single bough burst into bright white flowers and from their centres came two beautiful birds with heads of women and bodies of pure, translucent ice. The wizard was so proud to have created them that he called out for his fellows to marvel at the feat and admire how well he had done.

But they were not impressed - in fact, one person laughed out loud and said that it looked like a bunch of snow-white worms wriggling about on some frozen apples. So from then on, these magical birds became known as Alkonosts or Snowy Ladies.

Chapter 6: Alicanto

Origin: CHILEAN Mythology



The miner looked up at the star-strewn sky. There was no moon tonight, and it was pitch dark up in the mountains. But after nightfall was the only time for this work. Through a gap in the cliffs, he saw it again—the glow of the Alicanto, flying not far ahead. He knew if he followed it, the Alicanto would lead him to untold hidden treasures, or at the very least, silver and gold. He had heard that he could persuade the radiant bird to become an ally, to share its spoils with him if he pledged to share all of his future finds in return. Well, after a share of the Alicanto's treasure, he would never need to mine again! How hard could it be to fool a shiny bird? He was gratified to see he was gaining on the Alicanto, now perched on a rocky outcrop. This one glowed gold, he was going to be rich, or so he thought.

The Alicanto rose into the sky and started circling. This was it; he mustn't lose sight of the bird now. With greed building inside of him for all that he might find, the miner quickened his pace and kept the bird fixed in his sights. He came around the corner, eager to see if it was treasure or gold deposits, and stepped out onto thin air. The Alicanto looked on as another greedy soul plummeted off a cliff onto the jagged rocks below.

Northern Chile is home to the Atacama desert, the birthplace of the legend of the Alicanto. During the day, this bird looks commonplace, but at night it glows with metallic brilliance. Some accounts say it is enormous; others that it is a large eagle or vulture with a graceful swan-like head—apart from its pointed beak. It also has a vast wingspan and long legs with sharp claws, fitting the description of the world's largest flying bird: the Andean condor which can be seen in this area. Setting it apart from the Andean condor is its appearance by night, as well as its diet of precious minerals. With its gleaming eyes and brilliant plumage, it appears like a beacon in the night sky. Its glow is such that it casts no shadow, even during the day when it disguises its

radiance, and that is one way you can discern the Alicanto from other birds.

The Alicanto can shine gold like the Sun or silver like the Moon, depending on which precious metal it is fond of eating. Some legends say that the feathers are silver- or gold-tipped. There have even been reports of a very rare and beautiful green Alicanto that ate copper ore. Other myths claim them to eat a mixture of precious metals and ores and display multiple shimmering colors in their iridescent plumage. Its eyes emit a strange beam of light that can reveal hidden secrets, and light up the darkest crevices. This ability comes in useful as they nest in dark caves.

There appear to be several commonly held misconceptions about the Alicanto bird that represent partial truths. The first misconception is that the Alicanto is flightless: this is the case only when the bird has gorged itself on precious metals and is subsequently too heavy to fly. It will then travel by running along the ground with its wings stretched out—this is why it chooses to roost near a reliable food supply. However, if it has grossly over-eaten, it cannot run at all and can only move slowly when full of precious metal.

The second misconception is that it is entirely nocturnal. The Alicanto does usually keep itself hidden during the day and comes out at night to feed. However, there are reports of sighting a large bird with no shadow during the day, which is seen as good luck and indicates that there are precious metals nearby. For this reason, miners, prospectors, and treasure hunters dream of spotting an Alicanto as a sign that they are focusing their efforts in the right place. They may even decide to search for the Alicanto during the night in the hope that they can follow it to riches.

Some people mistakenly believe that you can secretly follow an Alicanto without them knowing. But nothing escapes the bird's

notice, particularly clumsy, noisy humans. They say that if an Alicanto sees you, it will simply vanish, finding a dark place to conceal itself. But this is if you are lucky. There are far less desirable outcomes of following an Alicanto. The bird has magical abilities that extend beyond its beautiful appearance and is said to possess the ability to read people's intentions—the worse your intentions, the worse the outcome. The Alicanto may deem you unworthy of finding her fortune. It will lead you astray and, with a flash of brilliant light, leave you dazzled or blinded, lost in the mountains. With darker intentions, excessive greed and selfish ambition will have you lead off a cliff to your death.

There is hope for those with a pure heart and benevolent intentions: the Alicanto will allow you to follow it and lead you to the means for prosperity. And this is exactly what is said to have happened to Juan Godoy in 1832, marking the beginning of the Chilean silver rush.

Chapter 7: Gandabherunda

Origin: Hindu Mythology



Another devotee was missing. There were rumors; people captured by a demon king. Lord Vishnu was determined to rescue his followers but knew he would have to change his physical form to be successful. If the rumors were true, he would need to be something ferocious enough to take on a demon king. So he transformed himself into Narasimha, part lion, part man, and went to see for himself. He found the demon king and the abducted devotees who had not forsaken Vishnu, despite being terrorized. In the form of the ferocious lion-man, Vishnu ripped into the demon king with knife-like claws and teeth, shredding him into thousands of pieces that scattered across the land. The devotees escaped, but the lion-man form of Vishnu barely noticed, still consumed by the red fires of rage. His fury did not subside with the destruction of the demon king; instead, it grew, consuming him. It was as if he had become a monster himself, bringing destruction whichever way he turned. So uncontrollable was his spiraling rage that he was becoming a threat to the existence of the very universe.

Lord Shiva, the destroyer, was called upon by the gods to control Vishnu's lion-man form, at any cost, in order to save the universe and everything in it. Shiva chose to transform into a winged lion in order to defeat the lion-man incarnation of Vishnu. But Vishnu's lion-man form was too quick, propelled by the power of his fury, he transformed into a terrible two-headed eagle that could battle any winged lion. Here was Gandaberunda, with his two-heads, and vast wings. The battle went on for eighteen days. Finally, with two mighty beaks full of razor-sharp teeth, Gandaberunda tore into Shiva's winged-lion form and feast on his hide. Following the defeat of the winged lion, Vishnu was able to regain control and return to his usual form. Vishnu's radiating peace transformed Shiva back to his usual self and calm spread across the land.

Ferocious, powerful, devourer of winged-lions. But also a strong protector, able to contain his rage to safeguard the universe and restore peace. This is how the kite-like Gandaberunda, an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, is

portrayed. There are many versions of the story with different endings, but the theme of controlling destructive anger with calm and peace remains.

Many images of two-headed birds can be found throughout India's history, such as peacocks, parrots and swans, but none as imposing as Gandaberunda—the ferocious warrior bird. Early depictions of double-headed eagles or kites were thought to have travelled from Turkey where there is a carving thought to be from 1000 BC. The design appears to have then spread across Europe (both Austria and Russia have used two-headed eagles in royal crests), as well as into India. The two-headed eagle can also be found in the Buddhist tradition.

In Buddhist oral tradition, there is a story of Gandaberunda where the two heads represent two brothers. One brother came upon a delicious flower while his brother was asleep and ate it without waking him. When the other brother awoke and found out, he was furious. Out of spite, he ate a poisonous flower that killed them both. It is used as a warning tale to encourage unity; otherwise, you will perish like the two-headed eagle.

When depictions of the two-headed eagle reached Southern India they became known as Gandaberunda and the imagery was no doubt influenced by the brahminy kite that can still be seen gracing the skies. Gandaberunda was favored by ancient royal dynasties in the region and was a very popular image throughout Indian history with some uses persisting to this day. Karnataka state in Southern India has maintained the Gandaberunda as the official emblem of their government as a symbol of power and peace, inherited from the royal dynasties that preceded the formation of the state. The two-headed kite can also be found on coins, ornaments, monuments, temples and royal textiles. Gandaberunda even made a famous appearance on a Bollywood wedding sari, and is on the crest of Bengaluru Football Club.

In Hindu temples, Gandaberunda makes many appearances in carvings and paintings. To display his magical strength, he is often shown clutching elephants in his beak or talons. There are even earlier depictions showing him clutching tigers, and some of the representations are anthropomorphized with a mixture of human and animal features. One temple has an image inspired by the Vishnu and Shiva story called “The Chain of Destruction” and shows the Gandaberunda attacking a lion, which is attacking another lion attacking an elephant. A temple in Karnataka state has a pillar etched with the two-headed kite crushing an elephant in a show of strength. Accordingly, local farmers in the area believe that Gandaberunda will protect their fields from being raided by wild elephants.

As a symbol of power and protection, Gandaberunda fights the forces of destruction. But he also reminds us that it takes more strength to maintain calm in the face of fury and chaos and to use this to promote peace in the world.

Chapter 8: Jatayu

ORIGIN: HINDU MYTHOLOGY



While resting in the forest, the wizened King of the Eagles, Jatayu, heard the frantic screams of someone calling for help. Jatayu recognized the voice of Rama's wife, Sita, whom Jatayu had sworn to protect. The Eagle king was devoted to Rama; he quickly unfolded his gigantic wings to pursue the sound of Sita's screams. Soaring through the skies at great speed, he soon recognized the flying chariot of the multi-headed demon king Ravana, with Sita struggling to free herself from his grip. Already advanced in years, Jatayu knew he was no physical match for the powerful demon Ravana with his many heads and many arms. Nevertheless, he was determined to be of service to Sita, even if it meant sacrificing himself.

According to the Hindu epic Ramayana, Jatayu was a demi-god in the form of an enormous eagle, although he is sometimes also referred to as a vulture. He was the son of Aruna, and Garuda's nephew; they were also of avian origin. Aruna and his wife Shyeni had one other son, Jatayu's elder brother Sampati. According to mythology, the brothers used to compete to see who could fly the highest. One day, Jatayu flew too close to the sun and his feathers began to scorch and smoulder. Sampati spread his vast wings between the sun and his younger brother, protecting him but burning his own wings. Jatayu helped his injured brother to the ground but Sampati's wings were damaged beyond repair and, wingless, he never flew again. This act of self-sacrifice would stay with Jatayu for the rest of his life.

Jatayu explained his lineage to Rama and his younger brother Lakshman when they came upon him in the forest one day during Rama's exile. Rama and Lakshman mistook Jatayu for a demon at first, due to his sheer size and bird-like appearance. However, Jatayu spoke pleasantly to them and explained that he was a friend of Rama's father, King Dasharatha. Hearing this, the brothers inquired about his name and lineage. In telling his own story, Jatayu thereby described

the genesis of all beings and from which goddesses each type of life form was born. Jatayu offers to help Rama while he is in exile, suggesting that he could guard their home. He cautioned them that the forest was full of predators and demons and that he could take care of Sita if Rama and Lakshman had to go out. Rama agreed and they continued through the forest together.

On the day of Sita's abduction, Jatayu's location is unclear, although Rama and Lakshman are tricked into hunting a golden deer by Ravana. Ravana, a demon depicted as having many heads and arms, steals Sita away in his flying chariot, so the famous Ramayana goes. Jatayu is the first to hear her calls for help. Even though he knows he is not a physical match for Ravana and is unlikely to be able to rescue Sita, he sets off in pursuit because he is determined to be of service even if he cannot save her. After catching up to them, Jatayu and Ravana engage in a vicious battle with clashing talons, sharp beak, and weapons. Jatayu fought valiantly but Ravana clipped one of his wings with one of his swords, though some say it was with a diamond-tipped arrow. Terribly wounded and bleeding freely, Jatayu was desperate to help Sita for his beloved Rama, and bravely continued fighting, even if only to delay their escape.

When his second wing was torn by a mighty blow from Ravana, no longer able to fly, he plummeted to the ground and crashed onto the rocks. With his eyes looking skyward, watching the direction of Ravana's chariot, he repeated Rama's name to himself. As Jatayu lay dying, Rama and his brother Lakshman came across him in their search for Sita. Jatayu told them of the recent battle and that Ravana had headed south towards the kingdom of Lanka. He then died and Rama performed the funeral rites, giving him a full cremation so he could attain salvation. Rama is even reported to have said that the loss of loyal Jatayu caused him more pain than Sita's kidnap.

The place where Jatayu fell was named Jatayumangalam in his honour, now known as Chadayamangalam in Kerala, South India. It is the home of the world's largest bird sculpture, a 61 meter (200 ft) long statue of Jatayu lying stricken on the ground. Other places are also credited with being the spot where Jatayu fell, such as Lepakshi in Andhra Pradesh. The village of Lepaksi translates to 'get up, bird' in Telugu, the very words Rama is said to have uttered to Jatayu. Vijayaraghava Perumal temple in Tamil Nadu also claims a connection to Jatayu as the place where Rama performed the funeral rites, as does a temple in Tamil Nadu. In 2016, the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, used Jayatu as an example of the first to fight terrorism in ancient times.

The information Jatayu gave Rama, that Ravana had taken Sita south to his kingdom of Lanka, enabled Rama to pursue and eventually rescue Sita, but it had cost Jatayu the ultimate sacrifice: laying down his life in defiance of tyranny and terror.

Chapter 9: Garuda

Origin: Hindu Mythology



The mother of the birds, Vinata, anxiously watched her remaining egg. She had been waiting for hundreds of years for it to hatch and the time was drawing near. She would not let impatience get the better of her again. Even with the serpents ruling over her home; her marriage. She had broken her first egg early, eager for a son to support and protect her from her husband's other wife and her thousand serpent sons, while their husband was away meditating in the forest. But in breaking the egg, she inadvertently weakened her son, born not fully formed, and angry with her for her mistake. Oh, Aruna; she missed him every day even though she could see he pulled the chariot of the sun across the sky. Refocusing her gaze on the heat emanating in waves from her precious giant egg, the shell suddenly split open in a burst of fire. A glowing golden bird was rising from the egg, growing larger and larger in front of her eyes. Still larger and larger he grew, towering above her. He threw out his wings in a movement that shook the heavens. Even the gods took notice and begged for mercy from this huge fiery creature. He heeded them and shrunk himself down to a more amenable size. At last, Garuda was born.

This is the tale of Garuda's birth, and from this dramatic entrance, he has been involved in many exciting adventures since. In Hindu mythology, Garuda is described as a giant kite. He is depicted in early Indian temples, such as the Badami cave temples in India, as far back as the 6th century.

Garuda is perhaps most famous for being the mount of the Hindu supreme god Vishnu. There is a particular story about how this came about as a consequence of Garuda's other escapades. After Garuda was born, his mother was tricked into slavery by her husband's other wife, Karuda, also known as the mother of serpents. Karuda was known for her cunning and ambition; she wanted her one thousand serpent sons to have more power than any bird.

When Garuda's elder brother Aruna heard of their mother's predicament he charged Garuda with securing her release from Karuda's clutches. Garuda immediately grew to a size so immense that one flap of his wings could take him anywhere in the world. He negotiated with the hoard of serpent sons who said they would release his mother only in return for the elixir of immortality, the *amrita*, held safely in heaven where they could not go.

Garuda agreed. With another flap of his colossal wings, he flew up to heaven to ask the gods for the elixir that would secure his mother's freedom. But the gods did not believe him and thought he wanted the elixir to make himself immortal. In a rage, Garuda grew so large that one almighty flap of his wings scattered the gods across the skies, enabling him to snatch the elixir. On his way down from heaven, Garuda encountered Vishnu, who evidently did believe him. Vishnu requests that Garuda become his mount and in return, he will grant Garuda immortality.

When Garuda reaches the serpents' lair, he plays them at their own game. He presents them with the elixir but says they have to purify themselves before they can drink it in order to become immortal. While they hastily slither off to do so, Garuda frees his mother. When the serpents return, he feasts mercilessly on all of them. Garuda returns the elixir to heaven and enters into service as Vishnu's mount.

This story offers an explanation as to why many birds of prey eat snakes and why Garuda is often depicted as carrying a pot of *amrita*—as well as wings he sometimes has two or four arms. Another tale makes it clear that Garuda is immune to snake venom. This is why his image is so popular on charms and amulets to protect people from snakes and snakebites. In days of old, people left delectable offerings to both heaven and the underworld. Garuda represented heaven, while the many-

headed snake, Kaliya, represented the underworld. Thinking his venom would be enough to protect him from Garuda's wrath, Kaliya insolently ate all of the offerings.

As Hinduism spread to Nepal and Southeast Asia, Garuda travelled with it. In Buddhism, Garuda represents wisdom and a whole race of birds rather than one individual. The Garudas are natural enemies of the serpents, with only the Buddha himself able to call for peace between them.

Though originally depicted in animal form, Garuda is often seen in anthropomorphized form with the body of a man but wings, beak or hooked nose, and sharp talons. Images of Garuda became more human-like as his stories spread throughout Southeast Asia, but then he is said to have the ability to shape-shift into a human at will, in addition to changing his size. Many statues of Garuda can be seen throughout many Southeast Asian countries. Representations of Garuda are included in royal and military insignias and he is a national emblem in Thailand and Indonesia. He even forms the Indian air force coat of arms, representing courage. On one hand, Garuda symbolizes deadly speed, violence and military prowess; while on the other, he is beloved for symbolizing virtue, protection and hope.

Chapter 10: Hugin and Munin

Origin: Norse Mythology



Revna always came up here to think. To walk off her frustrations, to find answers. Sometimes just to get away from the day-to-day drudgery of the village. Today, the fells were blustery on the way up but strangely still by the time she got out onto the top. As if the wind had decided to go elsewhere as she passed through the trees. The heather was in bloom, tiny purple blossoms in an otherwise brown-green spiky tangle, growing in swathes between the rocks. Most of the villagers complained about the bleak mountainous scenery, but she felt like it ran through her veins.

She heard a raven, the distinctive throaty chatter so different from any other bird; it was as if they were talking. A second raven glided gracefully down to land next to its mate. They didn't usually approach this close; come to think of it, they looked slightly larger than the usual pair she saw up here. She admired their iridescent plumage, marveling at how black could look so many different colors. They seemed to be walking along with her, hopping from rock to rock and chattering as they went. "All right, all right, are you trying to tell me something?" she laughed at the birds. They paused with her for a moment and then started croaking on again. That was strange, she thought.. Then the birds suddenly fell silent, looked at each other, and took off into the sky, soaring away into the far distance. She had just seen Hugin and Munin.

The raven features widely in the mythology and folklore of the northern countries as a powerful magical symbol. They are intelligent birds and have a wide range of distinctive vocalizations, including deep sonorous croaks, making it sound as if they have something to say. This is no doubt why they feature so often in myths and legends from these mountainous areas. They are opportunistic carrion birds, which is why gathering ravens may indicate death. That is possibly why the sinister-sounding term for a flock is an unkindness of ravens or a conspiracy of ravens.

Arguably the most well-known ravens are Hugin and Munin (sometimes spelled Huginn and Muninn) from Norse mythology. In the Old Norse language, *hugr* means thought, but *munr* is harder to translate into a single English word. Munin is often called memory or mind as the word *munr* has connotations of thought with desire and emotion. Hugin and Munin are the Norse god Odin's two ravens. Odin, sometimes called the raven-god, is almost always depicted with two ravens. Examples of this can be seen on many ancient artifacts such as helmet plates, war banners, figurines—and even surviving tapestry fragments—from as far back as the 6th Century AD. Pairs of raven brooches were also the fashion once, worn one on each shoulder as a reference to Odin.

Although Hugin and Munin do not feature heavily in many written texts, they have been passed on in verbal storytelling and were mentioned in 13th Century Edda poetry. This poetry indicates that each day, Odin sent them out to fly across the world. They would be his eyes and ears and return to his shoulders, telling him the news of the world. Thus, Odin increased his wisdom. The Edda poetry indicates that Odin fears for their return. Scholars have debated the interpretation of this as it could reference Odin's shamanic abilities to send his thoughts and mind out around the world via Hugin and Munin as his spirit animals. The poetry also states that the ravens were very astute at returning with information about who had been killed, consistent with them being carrion birds. One example of Hugin and Munin returning with this sort of news is the story of how Odin gained the Mead of Inspiration (also called the mead of poetry). It goes something like this.

There was a divine being called Kvasir who embodied wisdom, combining an intelligent head and a peaceful heart. He wandered the earth answering the people's questions, and everyone benefited from his visits. Two dwarves, the brothers Fjalar and Galar (meaning Deceiver and Screamer), heard of

wise Kvasir and asked him to come and visit them to answer their question. They callously murdered him and used his blood to make mead that would give inspiration in poetry and scholarship. They had a taste for murder and soon killed a giant named Gilling and his wife. With poetic finesse from the mead, they sang exquisite songs about their murder into the night. The giants' son Suttung heard the song and stole the mead, hiding it inside a mountain and placing his daughter on guard. The dwarves bemoaned their situation the next day on the way to market while ravens were listening. Hugin and Munin flew back to Odin and told him of the murdered giants and the Mead of Inspiration inside the mountain. Odin was keen to recover the mead. After his signature disguises and trickery, he seduces the giantess guard, promising to sing songs about her beauty that will be passed down through the ages. He takes the mead, narrowly escapes, and returns it to Asgard, where he provides inspiration to those he deems deserving.

As the Norse god of war and wisdom, it is particularly fitting that Odin is accompanied by the ravens Hugin and Munin, intelligent birds with connotations of life and death.

Section Three | Cryptic Canines

The gray wolf was once a common sight across many parts of Eurasia and North America, and dogs have been domesticated for hundreds of years. Because of this long-standing relationship, wolves and dogs are prominent in myth and legend.

Wolves are effective pack hunters, so historically have the reputation of being vicious predators. In ancient myths and legends, canines usually represent death and destruction.

The three-headed dog, Cerberus, is something many people are familiar with and inspired J. K. Rowling's character Fluffy, a terrifying three-headed guard dog. In Greek mythology, Cerberus is the guard dog of the underworld, but his two-headed brother and his guard duties are less familiar. J. K. Rowling's character Fenrir Greyback is also inspired by Norse mythology and werewolf legends.

In Norse mythology, the giant wolf Fenrir plays an important role at the end of the world, and it is wolves that will swallow the Sun and the Moon. While in Egyptian mythology, the wolf-headed god Anubis symbolizes death and judgment.

The werewolf has a well-established place in popular culture and is also portrayed as a lethal predator. But the mythological canine has another side, one we are more familiar with in the domestic dog. Canine mothers are often seen as nurturing and fiercely protective, such as the Roman legend of the wolf who nursed Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. The Norse god Odin also had two loyal wolf companions, fearless protectors, representing a side of canines more familiar to the modern world.

This section also includes lesser-known canines of myth and folklore, such as the elusive hunter Amarok from Inuit mythology and the strange and murderous Sigbin from the Philippines.

Chapter 11: Amarok

Origin: Inuit Mythology



She sensed the hunter out on the ice before she saw him. She caught his smell, brought to her by the icy wind, and pricked up her grey ears. A hunter out alone in the long night?—they should know better. She easily lifted her hulking body up and slunk off, her large paws padding silently on top of the snow's crust. The howling arctic wind whipped any sound of her movement away. The hunter had his back to her, with no inkling of her approach, no warning of what was about to happen. Too easy, thought Amarok. With sharp fangs glistening, she pounced on him, pinning him to the ground in a single agile movement. Her fangs sliced through layers of animal hide clothing and into flesh with ease, and then she shook him like a rag doll, his lifeblood spilling away. As the hunter's spirit left his body, he looked down and realized the elders had been right: Don't go hunting on your own during the night—the Amarok will get you.

Wolves play a prominent role in Inuit mythology, and there are many tales of Amarok, the mother of wolves, from icy northern areas. Amarok is an Inuit word for wolf, but explorers from the 1800s observed that some communities used this word only to describe a fantastic beast, a giant solitary wolf with very sharp teeth and supernatural strength. It is said to hunt alone and will pick off any hunters who venture out on their own at night, bearing in mind that winter nights in the far North are very long. Just because you are not alone does not mean you are safe:

A man heard there was an amarok nearby and decided to go out looking for it. He was mourning the death of a relative, so he was not in his right mind and was looking for some excitement as a distraction from his grief. Another relative accompanied him, and they set off. They found the amarok's pups, and the mourner suddenly killed them all. Led by his frightened relative, they both ran to hide in a cave. The amarok returned with a caribou in her jaws but couldn't find her pups anywhere. From their hiding place, they saw the amarok run to the lake's edge and start to

pull something with a human shape out of the water. Instantly, the mourner's body slumped to the ground, lifeless. His relative fled home, and the amarok let him go. He told everybody what he had seen, that the amarok had pulled the mourner's soul from his body. Nothing can be hidden from an amarok.

But Amarok is not only a cold-blooded killer and is shown in a different light in some myths:

Once, the sky god Kaila told the people to only hunt healthy, fully grown caribou so that they too would grow healthy and strong. But the caribou herds soon became full of old and weak animals, and there was not enough food to go around to maintain a healthy herd. The people did not want to disobey the sky god Kalia by eating sick or old animals and began to go hungry. Kaliya went to Amarok, the mother of all wolves, and said, "Amarok, you must tell your children, the wolves, to eat the weak, sick and old caribou so that the Sons of the Women can hunt and eat again." Amarok instructed her children to do this, and from that day forward, wolves preyed upon the slowest members of the herd. Soon the herd grew healthy and strong again, and the people, wolves, and caribou lived in perfect balance. This story was intended to symbolize the interconnectedness of people and animals and that they are all part of the same cycles of life and death.

Many Inuit myths and legends were recorded and translated by the explorer Hinrich Johannes Rink. The story of the orphan boy is told with many variations up and down the coastal areas:

There was once a poor orphan boy called Kagsagsuk. He was not well looked after by his family. They wouldn't let him into the main room of the house, and he slept in the corridor with the dogs. He was not fed well, so he was very small and weak. Everyone in the village mocked him. One day he prayed for the god of strength to help him, and suddenly Amarok appeared. Amarok knocked him down with her tail, and some small bones

fell from his body. Amarok explained that these seal bones had been stopping his growth. She knocked him down again, and a few more pieces of bone came away. Upon Amarok's request, the boy returned every day to wrestle with her until he grew strong. Amarok told him to keep his new strength a secret until the time was right, and on the way home, even though the villagers mocked him, he ignored them. Then one day, three huge polar bears were seen heading toward the village. Kagsagsuk ran out and killed them with ease, leaving the whole village amazed. Now they all wanted him to come into their homes and eat with them. He did so, but those who had tormented him in the past came to a gruesome end as Kagsagsuk showed them no mercy.

It is thought that the origin of Amarok is quite likely the giant dire wolf, a species that went extinct at the end of the last ice age. It is possible that the stories of such a huge and fearsome creature have been passed down from generation to generation.

Chapter 12: Fenrir

Origin: Norse Mythology



Fenrir lies motionless as if his giant wolf body has been turned to stone and become part of the earth. The tight bindings around his legs and neck prevent him from moving, and the sword through his muzzle keeps him from making a sound. His piercing eyes are closed, but he senses the passing of night and day. He has lost track of how long he has been trapped like this, but his agony seems endless. His pointed ears hear everything while he bides his time, waiting for revenge. Fenrir festers, the feelings of betrayal as raw as if it all happened yesterday. He would wreak vengeance on those responsible for this. He will make them pay—he will kill the god Odin.

Fenrir is a giant wolf from Norse mythology. He is often portrayed as an enormous wolf with a shaggy black coat, rows of sharp fangs, and intense, fiery eyes. His incredible strength and vicious temperament are evident in many paintings of Fenrir. Several surviving carvings and runestones depict Fenrir in the United Kingdom and Sweden, highlighting Fenrir's importance in Norse mythology. He is also described in the Poetic Eddas, particularly in the tale of his binding. Though Fenrir is associated with much ferocious imagery, he was once just a pup.

Fenrir is the son of Loki, the trickster god, and Angrboda, the giantess (meaning “she who bodes anguish”). Loki has three children with Angrboda. Fenrir's siblings are Hel, the girl of life and death, and Jörmungandr, the giant serpent.

One night, the god Odin receives a prophecy foretelling that Loki's three monstrous children will cause a great deal of trouble and disaster. This destruction is inevitable because of the nature of their giant mother combined with the nature of their mischievous and untrustworthy father. Odin sees his own death in Fenrir's jaws—he decides to act to prevent this morbid prediction from coming to pass.

Odin calls for Loki's children to be brought from the land of the giants. He thinks of finding some occupation to keep them out of trouble while also keeping them far away from the gods. Odin sends the giant serpent into the sea and Hel into the underworld to rule over the dead who do not go to Valhalla. That leaves Fenrir, who has grown even on the journey to Asgard. Odin decides to keep Fenrir among them, thinking that it is too unsafe to send him away, even though he believes Fenrir will cause his death.

As Fenrir grows ever larger and more muscular, only the god Tyr is brave enough to approach him and feed him. Being one of the gods that collected him from the land of the giants when he was a pup, Tyr has no doubt grown fond of him, and Fenrir has not done anybody any harm—yet. Odin knows that even a docile young wolf may grow up to challenge and kill its own parents for dominance in the pack. And Fenrir is no ordinary wolf. The gods become increasingly afraid of Fenrir and know his strength now far surpasses their own.

Considering the ominous prophecy, the gods decide that Fenrir should be tied up to keep him from harming anybody. The first chain they make is not strong enough. They make a game of it with Fenrir, saying it is a chance to test his strength and become famous. Fenrir agrees to be chained up but breaks the chain with such ease that the gods are more afraid than before, though they cheer and clap, congratulating Fenrir on his strength. The gods make a second chain, mighty in size and twice as strong as the first. Fenrir again agrees to be chained up for a chance to prove his strength and gain recognition. After a struggle, Fenrir manages to break the second chain, proudly standing free. Again the gods deviously congratulate him on his strength, but they are now very worried.

Odin decides to commission a binding from the dwarves, known to be the most masterful craftsmen in all of the lands. The

dwarves use some special materials to make the binding: the footsteps of a cat, the sinews of a bear, the beard of a woman, the roots of a mountain, the breath of a fish, and the spit of a bird. If any of these are now hard to find, perhaps the dwarves used them all up to make the third binding. When they were finished, the dwarves had produced a long smooth ribbon that was, despite its appearance, unbreakable.

When Odin took it to Fenrir to supposedly test his strength, Fenrir took one look at it and suspected treachery. What fame would he achieve from breaking a ribbon? The gods taunted him, saying that he was afraid of a ribbon. Fenrir said he would consent to be tied by this ribbon if someone put their hand in his mouth as a show of trust: he would let them go as soon as they untied him if he could not break free from the ribbon. The gods agreed to the oath. They looked at each other; no one was prepared to sacrifice their hand. Then Tyr stepped forward and laid his wrist across Fenrir's teeth, he knew binding Fenrir was going to cost him his hand, and it did.

For this reason, Tyr is known as the god of Law and Justice, and he made a sacrifice for the greater good of his people. However, at the time of Ragnarok, the end of the world, the ground will shake so violently that any bindings will be broken. Fenrir will be free again and seek his revenge.

Chapter 13: Orthrus

Origin: Greek Mythology



Orthrus stretched out in the meadow, his legs flicking in his slumber as he dreamed of chasing a hare. A faint sound in the grass caused Orthrus to snap awake; he sprung to his feet and was instantly alert. Orthrus was guarding the cows, as usual —it had been a quiet night so far. His two noses sniffed the wind. Something was coming. The cows, unaware, remained asleep, some lying down, some standing, spread out across the pasture. Orthrus turned his two heads in two different directions, listening. Several things were coming. He lowered his body to the ground, waiting. A pack of wolves was closing in on the herd of cattle.

Orthrus crept through the grass, keeping his body low; the wolves hadn't seen him yet. He waited for them to come closer. Then Orthrus pounced on the nearest wolf and ripped it limb from limb with one bite from a set of his mighty jaws. That had drawn the wolves' attention; they began to close in on Orthrus, thinking that, as they greatly outnumbered him, they were safe. The snarling wolves came for Orthrus. At first one, then many at the same time. In a blur of fur and blood spatters, Orthrus tore into the wolves as they tried to attack him. When the gnashing of fangs and shredding of flesh was over, Orthrus alone stood upright, seemingly unhurt, silhouetted against the lightening sky. The bodies of the wolves were strewn about him on the ground, limp and lifeless, as the morning mists began to roll in. He was called the murderous hound for good

In ancient Greek mythology, two particular beasts spawned many horrifying monsters, including Orthrus the two-headed dog. Orthrus was the firstborn of his parents Echidna and Typhon, each terrifying in their own right. Orthrus' mother, Echidna, was half-woman, half-serpent and his father was the multi-headed man-serpent, Typhon. Their other children included: two dragons; the Hydra, a multi-headed water snake; Chimera, a creature with a lion's head, a goat's body, and tail of a dragon; and Cerberus, the three-headed dog. Some sources include the Sphinx and Nemean Lion as Orthrus' siblings. However, other

sources consider these creatures to be Orthrus' or Cerberus' children.

Orthrus, the two-headed dog, is not as well known as his three-headed brother Cerberus, though they are both described as having furious strength, which is not surprising considering their parentage. However, Orthrus does make some appearances in art. For example, a decorated red-figure cup from around 500 BC shows Orthrus with an arrow protruding from his chest and a serpentine tail. Orthrus is sometimes shown with a dog's tail and sometimes with the tail of a serpent. Usually, he is pierced with arrows in reference to the role he played in the story of Hercules' labors. Orthrus was part of the tenth impossible task Hercules undertook in penance for murders he committed when he had been caused to lose his mind.

On the island of Erytheia, at the edge of the world, the giant Geryon had a beautiful herd of crimson cattle. They shone like the sunset and were healthy and strong. Geryon himself was a huge, powerful man with three heads and three pairs of legs. To protect his prized herd, Geryon the giant employed a cattle herder and his dog. But this dog was no ordinary dog; it had two heads, the tail of a snake, and was unfathomably strong. The dog, Orthrus, kept guard day and night, never tiring, protecting the cattle with the herder, to whom he was very loyal. Geryon the giant admired the dog for his strength and multiple heads, something they both had in common.

One day, a stranger appeared on the horizon. It was Hercules, and he had come to steal the famous red cattle of Geryon the giant. Orthrus smelled the intruder as he approached the grazing lands and went to seek him out. When Orthrus discovered Hercules, he leaped to attack him, but Hercules beat Orthrus back with his club, badly wounding him. As soon as the cattle herder saw the incident, he charged over to help his dog, but Hercules killed him with his arrows. Hercules finished off the

injured Orthrus with an arrow as well, leaving the meadow spattered with their blood. Geryon the giant joined the fray to try to stop Hercules from taking his precious cattle, but to no avail: he was also killed by Hercules' arrows. Hercules successfully stole the herd, but his labor was not over—his adventures continued as he struggled to get the crimson cattle of Erytheia home.

The inspiration for Orthrus could have come from the night sky. It is thought possible that the stellar constellations of Canis Major and Canis Minor may have been originally considered as a single canine with two heads, following the constellation of Orion, the hunter. Alternatively, Canis Major may have been considered a two-headed dog in early Greek mythology, which could be the origin of Orthrus' character. Clearly, the long-standing relationship between people and dogs has captured the imagination of humans since we looked up at the stars for stories to explain the world. And combining the dog with a penchant for super-strength and multiple heads creates a formidable adversary, unless, of course, you are Hercules.

Chapter 14: Sigbin

Origin: Filipino Folklore



It was a warm night marking the beginning of Holy Week. Mosquitoes droned in the shadows where the light from the single oil lamp did not entirely dispel the darkness. It was time. The old woman shuffled across the dirt floor of her hut, her stooped posture showing her age. Her gnarled hands reached up for one of the clay jars on the shelf, and she carefully lifted it down. She untied the rope with arthritic fingers, removed the cloth, and took out the stopper with slow, precise movements. She set it down in the middle of the floor, muttering to herself. Out climbed the sigbin, expanding to its full size as it escaped the pot. She was almost used to its stench after all these years since she had caught it. Invisible to others but not to her, the old woman appraised its bizarre shape, its dog-like face, long ears, and oversized back legs. Its fiery eyes looked at her briefly before it lumbered out of the hut, off into the darkness. She knew where it would go, sniffing out the children. It needed to feed. Hopefully, it would bring her something back, maybe a heart, and she would make an amulet. She could do with some luck.

In central Philippines, on the islands in the Visayas region, is the story of the sigbin. Holy Week is one of the most sacred times in the Eastern Orthodox Christian calendar. But while devout believers prepare for their Easter celebrations, something sinister stirs in the forest. Though it is usually invisible to the human eye, the sigbin is said to resemble a dog, goat, or kangaroo with hind legs that are longer than its front legs. It has red eyes and large, hairy ears that flap as it moves along. A sigbin's tail is long and flexible, which it can crack like a whip. Though people cannot often see the sigbin, they might well smell it as it reeks of rotting flesh.

When the sigbin is hungry, it will use its terrible magical powers to drink a person's blood through their shadow or resort to scavenging on the carcasses of deceased forest animals. If livestock has been killed, then a sigbin is often blamed. The sigbin is vampiric by nature, favoring a diet of human flesh, raw

off the bone. It is said to prefer children, and even a bite to the ankle can prove fatal. Sigbin will also drink blood, and if it gets desperate, will resort to scavenging: these actions the antithesis of traditional Filipino culture, where food is clean and flavorsome, and behavior is modest. In this way, the sigbin represents the opposite of traditional Filipino values. During the holiest of weeks, you cannot trust shadows, sleep may be dangerous or even fatal, and community harmony is disrupted. The very idea of a sigbin is to upset the natural order of the rural villages and could be seen to represent the darker sides of life that we try to push aside.

The nocturnal sigbin is said to be kept as a pet or assistant by the Aswang, evil spirits in Filipino folklore, including ghosts, vampires, and shape-shifters, and are the cause of many misfortunes. The sigbin undoubtedly spreads fear among the population. The Aswang dwell in dark and dingy locales, such as forests and cemeteries, an ideal location for their sigbin to lurk. Funerals and wakes in the Philippines are typically brightly lit to ensure that the Aswang won't attend, with their gruesome companions in tow.

There may also be some humans who possess the power to command the sigbin, who keep them in clay jars for safety. Having a sigbin under your control is said to be a symbol of personal good fortune and is viewed as a wealthy person's behavior, but it comes at a cost to others. This characteristic also goes against traditional values, as people see it as selfish and not in keeping with the community spirit.

While the sigbin is a creature of folklore, there may be some scientific truth to the tall tales. In 2003, a potentially new species of fox was reported to have been spotted in nearby Borneo. It was a mammal, presumed carnivorous, with a reddish-brown fury coat, long tail, and cat-like facial features. Scientists set up a camera in the forest, and it captured a photograph of the

animal. Could the sigbin possibly be real? Were the sightings based on truth rather than superstition? A long muscular tail is visible in the photo, with shining eyes partially obscured by the forest undergrowth. Its hind legs do appear to be longer than its front legs. Scientists debated the creature's existence, and in 2007, scientists decided that the animal was, in fact, a kind of large flying squirrel that is native to the area. The real sigbin could still originate from an as yet undiscovered species.

Whether the sigbin has its roots in fact or fiction, its ability to scare generation after generation makes it real enough to many who hear its legend. While people sleep with their children close by, their worst nightmare may well be crawling towards them.

Chapter 15: Cerberus

Origin: Greek Mythology



'Thank the gods that worked', thought Sybil of Cumae, an audible sigh escaping her lips. She took a breath for what felt like the first time in hours. She could barely bring herself to look at the sleeping monster, but neither could she tear her eyes away. Crumbs of honey cake littered the floor. She had doubted that the herbs would have been strong enough to sedate such a creature. But there the mighty hellhound lay, all three heads seemingly peacefully asleep. She didn't dare move a muscle. Drool dribbled from his three jaws, seeming to sizzle slightly as it hit the rocks beneath. His muscular body was temporarily relaxed, vicious claws at ease and snake-head tail lying limply on the ground. She summoned the courage to take a step back as silently as possible. Just then, Cerberus began to stir.

Cerberus the three-headed dog guards the main gates of the underworld for the god Hades who rules there. Often called the Hound of Hades, Cerberus prevents anyone from leaving the underworld, the dead or the living. The living are allowed in, but if they attempt to leave, he will devour them as a tasty morsel. Cerberus was the second born of powerful part-serpent parents Echidna and Typhon. Cerberus' older brother is Orthrus, another murderous multi-headed dog, but with a less well-known occupation. They both have monstrous strength and are renowned for their encounters with Hercules.

Most conceptions of Cerberus describe him with three heads, but earlier writings have sometimes given him 50 or 100 heads as a way to assign him relentless strength. Trying to reconcile these accounts, some scholars say he has three canine heads, and the rest are those of snakes. It is quite common to see Cerberus' tail depicted as a biting snake, which is not implausible considering his parents. In ancient art, Cerberus is usually depicted with three heads or less, thought to be due to logistical reasons. Three heads regained popularity because it links with the idea of symbolizing the past, present, and future.

By all accounts, Cerberus performed his guard duties very well, patrolling the rivers marking the border of the underworld, and monitoring all those, dead or alive, entering its gates. However, there are at least three instances of people getting the better of Cerberus. In one instance, Cerberus is sedated by a drugged honey cake, allowing a living soul to sneak past. In another case, the famous musician Orpheus is trying to retrieve his beloved from the underworld—she was killed by a snake. In the first time he played or sang since his tragic loss, Orpheus plays his harp-like instrument. The music is so moving and beautiful that even the hell hound is charmed beyond recognition, becoming docile and cooperative, and allows him to pass. The story goes that Orpheus met his beloved in the underworld but could not bring her out, and would have to wait for death to be reunited with her.

The most famous example of Cerberus being overcome involves Hercules. Hercules defeated Cerberus' brother Orthrus during his tenth impossible task given by King Eurystheus. Later, as Hercules' twelfth labor, King Eurystheus commanded Hercules to bring him the Hound of Hades to look upon—and to bring him alive. King Eurystheus asked this not because he wanted to see the beast but because he thought it completely unachievable. He was certain that Hercules would fail. Hercules visited a priest to get some advice about the underworld and its inhabitants. Using this advice, he persuaded Charon, the ferryman, to take him across the river Styx. He then entered the land of the dead. After a difficult journey through the underworld, Hercules asked Hades for his permission to take Cerberus from his guard post. Surprisingly Hades agreed but with conditions. Firstly, Hercules must overcome Cerberus without using any weapons, and secondly, he must promise to bring him back to resume his guard of the underworld. Some accounts say that Hades insisted that Hercules could use no iron weapons, and that is why some paintings show Hercules with a wooden club or rock and holding his lion skin as a shield.

Hercules fought Cerberus, and with his mighty strength, managed to grasp his three heads in a chokehold. Cerberus' snake tail struck him, but he was protected from its venom by the lion hide he wore, acting as a shield. With Cerberus subdued and out of breath, Hercules put him on a chain and led him out of the underworld. Cerberus was so dazzled by the daylight he spewed forth bile which caused plants there to be poisonous. This is why the entrance to the underworld is said to be marked by a profusion of poisonous aconite.

Hercules took Cerberus back to King Eurystheus as requested; everyone they passed on the way was terrified by the three-headed hell hound. King Eurystheus was no exception; he promptly hid in a vat as soon as he saw Cerberus and begged Hercules to take him away. King Eurystheus promised to release Hercules from his labors if he took Cerberus back to where he came from at once. So he did, and Cerberus became one of the very few monstrous creatures to meet Hercules and survive.

Section Four | The Eternal Hiss

The fastest-acting snake venom can kill you in less than half an hour, so no wonder some of the most terrifying monsters from myth and folklore are serpents.

Serpents feature in myth and folklore from almost every culture. For a creature that has been around since the dinosaurs, there is a very diverse range of snakes, represented by their symbolism. Some serpents are considered wise and knowledgeable, whereas others represent death and destruction. They can also symbolize healing, transformation, and rebirth due to their ability to shed their skin. Snakes that live in the ground are seen as a link between the world of the living and the underworld, like the Nidhöggr in Norse mythology.

In mythology from coastal communities, sea serpents are often featured, like Bakunawa in the Philippines and Jörmungandr from Norse mythology, both inhabiting the depths of the sea. A common theme across mythologies is a storm god battling a sea serpent, symbolizing the struggle against chaos. You will find examples of this popular theme from Norse, Greek, and Japanese mythology in this section.

Greek mythology has given us some of the most famous serpents. The Hydra, a multi-headed regenerating serpent; and in this part of the book, you will meet her mother, Echidna. Many have heard of Medusa from Greek mythology, but she also had two immortal sisters who are less renowned. In this section, lesser-known serpents and serpent-hybrids are discussed.

Mythological serpents are often portrayed as multi-headed, multi-tailed, or of gargantuan size to make them a truly

formidable adversary. The famous Basilisk, the serpent king from European legend, could also turn people to stone, like Medusa, yet another reminder that serpents can bring a swift end to mortal life.

Chapter 16: Typhon

Origin: Greek Mythology



Hera was furious. As the goddess of marriage and childbirth, how had her husband, Zeus, dared to have a child without her? On his own! The indignity. And he thinks himself fit to rule the gods. What an insult. Hera swore she would get revenge. Seething, she set out to bring a child into the world that would be able to challenge Zeus. Insurmountable strength would be required, and she knew just who to ask. She appealed to Gaia and Tartarus, to produce a child: a monster god. Hera waited, thinking how sweet it would be to see Zeus brought down from the throne. When the time was right, she watched the cave entrance, ready to meet her creation. A single serpent began to emerge from the cave. Hera felt a twinge of disappointment: granted, it was a giant snake, but not enough to kill a god. Interrupting her thought, another serpent came through the cave entrance, followed by a man's torso joined to the serpent coils at powerful thighs. The son of Gaia had one hundred heads emanating from his shoulders, and his eyes burned like fire. He unfolded his mighty black wings as he came out into the light, every inch of him looking venomous. 'Perfect,' whispered Hera, feeling as proud as if he were her own son. "He is Typhon," said Tartarus. "May he kill all the gods in Olympus."

One of the most deadly creatures in Greek mythology, Typhon is a monster but also a god. He is the youngest son of Gaia, the Earth, and Tartarus, the primordial God of the deep underbelly beneath the foundations of Earth. Typhon may have originally started out as a wind god, summoning typhoons, although this was a separate god in very early Greek mythology. The serpentine Typhon is described as being as tall as the stars, with viper tails in the place of legs. He has one hundred snake-like heads that emit sounds of many different animals, such as bulls, lions, boars, wolves, and bears, surrounding him in a cacophony of horrible noise. His red eyes are fiery and unnerving in themselves. He has vast dragon-like wings and spits plumes of fire. Poison exudes from every hair on his body, as well as his viper fangs. He is so strong that even the gods of Olympus

feared him, which is precisely what the goddess Hera had intended when orchestrating his creation. Typhon's mother Gaia had an earlier brood of children, the Giants, who were destroyed by Zeus. Gaia nursed a grudge against the gods of Olympus and raised her son Typhon accordingly; cruel, uncontrollable, and one who believed the throne was rightfully his and the rule of the Titans needed to continue.

Typhon is most known for this association with Echidna, who was half serpent, like himself. They birthed some of Greek mythology's most dangerous monsters including Orthrus and Cerberus, the multi-headed dogs with serpent tails, the Hydra, a multi-headed serpent that grew two heads if one was cut off, the Chimera, a creature that had the heads of a lion, a goat and snake; and even the Sphinx, the famous beast that would kill all those that could not answer her riddles. The list of their offspring continues with Ladon, the serpent like dragon that protects the golden apples in the Garden of Hesperides, the Nemean lion of the infamous Hercules' twelve labours, and the Gorgon Sisters, of whom Medusa was the most well known.

In the stories, a time came for Typhon to challenge Zeus and attempt to take over his rule. Typhon launched an attack on Mount Olympus in the middle of the night, throwing blazing rocks through the darkness, assailing the home of the gods. Most of the gods knew they were no match for Typhon and transformed themselves into animals so they could run away and hide. Even Hercules turned into a fawn and fled with the others to Egypt. Only Zeus and his daughter Athena (the same daughter he had birthed without his wife Hera) remained. Zeus had already beaten Gaia's other children, the Giants, and with encouragement, or some say goading, from Athena, he remained to answer Typhon's challenge.

Seeking revenge and power, Typhon threw more fiery rocks at Zeus, and as fire spurted from his mouth, lighting up the sky,

he lay waste the land thereabouts. Zeus fought back with his famous thunderbolts.

When Zeus caught up with him, he struck Typhon with an adamantine sickle and injured him. Although Typhon was wounded, he managed to wind his snake coils around Zeus and get the sickle from him. With the sickle, Typhon cut out the sinews from Zeus' hands and feet and took him prisoner. He kept Zeus in a cave, with his sinews hidden in a bearskin, both guarded by a serpent. Seeing what had happened, Athena sought out Zeus' son Hermes, who also fled to Egypt with the rest of the gods. It was Hermes who returned and rescued Zeus to reunite him with his sinews.

In some stories, Typhon then spent years torturing Zeus. It was Hermes' bravery which helped free Zeus from the clutches of Typhon, whose only purpose was to end the reign of the Olympians. A battle continued for ten thousand years with the uniting of all the Gods to end Typhon's tyranny. In the midst, hundreds of cities were burnt to the ground.

Zeus eventually defeats Typhon and manages to hurl him into the abyss, and the earth shudders in response. Finally, Zeus puts a mountain on top of the abyss to prevent Typhon from escaping. The mountain under which Typhon is trapped is known as Mount Etna, and any earthquake or volcanic activity today is attributed to Typhon trying to break free from his eternal prison.

The father of monsters is crucial to Greek myth, not only because he was feared by all the Gods, but also because his death marked the end of the battle between the Titans and the Olympians. Typhon was an example of a monster in the truest sense. A monster with one purpose - to end the reign of the Olympians. The destruction that came with that sole aim was of no consequence to him. With no redeeming quality, Typhon is often considered the epitome of pure evil.

Chapter 17: Fafnir

Origin: Norse Mythology



Hidden in the Scandinavian wilderness, the ill-tempered dragon was brooding in his lair with only one thing on his mind—guarding his gold. Clambering over his haul, checking each item, he remembers the heavy price he paid to seize it. He will do anything to keep it. Anything. He is isolated from his family and has abandoned his friends, but what are they when compared to his treasures? Fafnir strikes fear into the hearts of the nearby villagers and poisons the land with his toxic breath to scare anyone away that might come too close to his lair. Little does Fafnir know, his gold carries a curse, and the family that he betrayed to get it may well be plotting against him to get it back. Warriors may attempt to steal the gold, but while the curse remains, Fafnir's treasure will continue to bring misery to those who try to acquire it.

As far back as the Pagan times of Europe, the legend of Fafnir was told across the frigid northern seas from Iceland to Norway to Sweden. The warnings of this Germanic legend were sung on the wind, telling a tale of greed, murder, betrayal, and a deadly curse.

Originally, Fafnir was one of the three royal dwarf brothers, along with Otr and Regin, all sons of Hreidmar, the Dwarf King. Regin was a skilled craftsman and Otr a hunter, with the likeness of an otter during the day. Otr would catch salmon in the rivers for his family to eat. One day, the god Loki saw the otter and, not realizing his true identity, killed Otr. Loki and Odin took the otter skin to the Dwarf King's home to celebrate their catch. King Hreidmar recognized his deceased son and demanded payment for their mistake; they must stuff the otter's skin with gold. Loki dashed away, stuffing the otter skin with gold stolen from another dwarf, Andvari. Andvari the dwarf cursed his gold with a magic ring as Loki stole it: anyone who tried to possess the gold would be destroyed.

Upon receiving this doomed payment from Loki, King Hreidmar was soon murdered by Fafnir, his own son, who was so overcome with greed the moment he saw the gold. Fafnir took the golden treasure and fled through the forests to the mountains, where he hid, growing more greedy and suspicious every day. He turned himself into a dragon in order to better protect his treasure from outsiders. Fafnir exhaled his poisonous breath to keep any would-be thieves away, and for a while, it was successful.

But the lure of the treasure was too strong for some to resist. Fafnir's younger brother Regin had not forgotten the golden loot and was plotting to steal it for himself. Regin persuaded his foster-son Sigurd to murder Fafnir by stabbing him through the heart. Regin suggested that they could steal the dragon's treasure and share it between themselves.

Together, Regin and Sigurd forged a new sword, specially for their mission. The blade was named Gram and could slice through Regin's shield adorned with Fafnir's image. The two men were ready to fight their enemy.

As Regin retreated, Sigurd lay in a ditch waiting for Fafnir. Sigurd thrust his sword into Fafnir's chest, giving him a mortal wound. As Fafnir lay dying, he warned Sigurd of the curse and foretold that Regin would try to murder him too. Sigurd cut out Fafnir's heart, roasted it over a fire, and ate it. Upon tasting Fafnir's blood, Sigurd could suddenly understand the chattering birds nearby, and Fafnir's warning had proven true. Regin had been corrupted by the cursed gold and was planning to murder Sigurd. But, Sigurd killed Regin first and took Fafnir's treasure for himself.

The curse of the treasure indeed continued, as Sigurd himself also met a murderous end after yet more betrayals from family and first loves. Depending on the legend, the ending may differ. Some say that Andvari was eventually reunited with his gold after

it was left in a cave to break the curse. Others say that it was sunk to the bottom of the river Rhine, where it remains for no one to possess, ensuring the curse cannot be passed onto anyone else.

Fafnir's story is also featured on an elaborate carving in the historic Hylestad Stave Church in Norway, which now resides in the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo. The wooden carvings date back to the late 12th Century and show in great detail how Fafnir was killed, and the curse continued. Fafnir appears in the 11th Century runic rock carving in Sweden, known as the Ramsund Carving or the Sigurd Carving. This large carving illustrates Fafnir's execution at the sword of Sigurd. The carving still stands to this day.

By this point, these stories must sound all too familiar. Well the legend of Fafnir is such an affecting story that it has inspired recent tales in modern culture. Fafnir is said to be the inspiration behind J. R. R. Tolkien's character of Smaug, as well as appearing in the Richard Wagner opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and the novel *Day Watch* by Sergei Lukyanenko.

However the legend inspires us, the story of Fafnir serves as a cautionary tale about the perils of hoarding wealth and how obsession and greed can bring catastrophe to families and relationships.

Chapter 18: The Gorgon Sisters

Origin: Greek Mythology



Stheno sat with her back against the rocky wall outside the cave, her golden wings folded behind her. She was incensed, as usual, but had grown tired of pacing up and down. Now her rage simply simmered; a constant companion. She leaned her head back against the rocky wall and closed her eyes. She thought of her little sister, remembering how she used to be, with long golden hair, an innocent smile, and bright inquiring eyes. As a young child, Medusa had skipped everywhere. But as she came of age, her beauty had been her downfall. Desired by men; coveted by gods—Medusa had been cursed, and it was entirely their fault. The gods were no better than mortal men; she could happily kill them all. And now that Medusa could kill with one look, both her sisters Stheno and Euryale grew envious of her.

Greek mythology tells of three frightful sisters that are so horrifying in appearance that to look at any of them will turn you to stone. They are called the Gorgons, meaning grim and dreadful. The eldest is Stheno, the forceful and mighty. She is known to be ferocious and independent. Euryale of the wide sea, the far-roaming. She is known for her bellowing cries that can turn stone to sand. These two eldest sisters are immortal; whereas, Medusa, the guardian, is the youngest, and she is mortal. All three are powerful and vicious, born of the sea gods Phorcys and Ceto, though some claim they are the daughters of Typhon and Echidna.

In ancient Greek art, the Gorgons are often depicted as having broad, round faces, wings, and faces framed by snakes. They are shown with bulging staring eyes, and their wide mouths have teeth like the tusks of wild boar. They are described as being hideously ugly. These images were often used as symbols of protection, like gargoyles, on buildings. In Greek mythology, this is how the Gorgons first appeared, as protectors of oracles as far back as 6000 BC. Their appearance and purpose changed over the years and it was in Homer's *Iliad* and *The Odyssey*,

where the Gorgons began to get written into literature. Even then Homer mentions the idea of a single Gorgon and not three sisters. It wasn't until the 7th century BC, where Hesiod first mentions the existence of three Gorgons, sisters and daughters to Phorcys and Ceto. Hesiod is the first to mention the three sisters by name. It was the Greek poets that came after Hesiod that began to mention the Gorgon sisters as both beautiful and terrifying, and who gave Medusa the power to turn all men into stone with one glance.

It is important to note that one of Medusa's most popular stories involving Poseidon and Athena, was actually penned by Ovid, in his popular literary work *Metamorphoses*. This most popular tale of Medusa as a victim of the Gods was also a means for the Roman Ovid to express his disdain for the Greek Gods in a fashion dramatized far beyond any of his Greek counterparts. In Ovid's tale of Medusa, before she became a monster, she was a beautiful woman and a priestess in the temple of Athena and had therefore taken a vow of celibacy. Medusa's long golden hair shone in the sun, and many who saw her desired her. Her looks caught the attention of Poseidon, god of the sea. Poseidon violated Medusa in Athena's shrine. Following this event, the goddess Athena punished Medusa, finding no fault with Poseidon. Athena cursed Medusa as a punishment for defiling her shrine. She rid Medusa of her beauty, enraged that she had broken her vow of celibacy, whether it was with or without consent.

Medusa fled to her immortal sisters Stheno and Euryale, where they lived in a cave near the sea. Cast about the surroundings were remains of both man and beast that had been turned to stone. As time passed, Medusa seethed and festered until her appearance became more and more monstrous.

Meanwhile, on the island of Seriphos, another man in a position of power was planning to obtain a woman he desired.

King Polydectes wanted to get young Perseus off the island and out of the way because he was trying to pursue his mother. The King asked Perseus to bring him the head of the mortal Gorgon, Medusa, as a gift. The gods knew that King Polydectes' actions were not honorable, and for this reason, they helped Perseus, giving him magical objects to help him in his quest. The gods gave Perseus a blade, a sack, and a helmet. Hermes, the god of travel, gave his famous winged shoes, and Athena herself gave Perseus a mirrored shield.

Now well equipped, Perseus crept up to the cave in the dead of night. He looked around, using only the reflections in his shiny shield to guide him. All of the sisters were asleep. Medusa was sleeping so deeply that even the snakes emanating from her scalp were motionless. Perseus killed her as she slept, hacking her head off with a forceful blow from his sword. Medusa was pregnant to Poseidon, and as the blood gushed forth from her severed neck, so with it came two children. They were Pegasus, the winged horse, and Chrysaor, the giant.

Upon hearing the commotion, Medusa's sisters awoke. Euryale, in particular, let out an anguished cry, so horrible it began to crumble the stones about them. Both sisters were determined to kill Perseus and chased him as best they could. They lost track of him because the gods had given him the helmet of Hades to wear, which causes immense darkness, rendering him invisible. As well as this, he was wearing Hermes' winged shoes, giving him the ability to fly to escape their clutches.

When Perseus returned to the island of Seriphos with the head of Medusa in a bag, he discovered that his mother had been forced to marry King Polydectes against her will while he was away. Perseus went before the King, who asked if he had brought the Gorgon's head. With his face turned away, Perseus lifted Medusa's severed head from the sack and held it aloft. The

whole court was turned to stone, and his mother thus freed from her forced marriage by her death. Following this, Perseus returned the borrowed objects to the gods and gave Medusa's head to the goddess Athena. Athena duly mounted it onto her breastplate to petrify her enemies. Turned from beautiful to deadly, this is how Medusa and her Gorgon sisters have come to symbolize protection from dangerous threats.

Chapter 19: Lamia

Origin: Greek Mythology



Glancing anxiously around the courtyard, the mother called out: 'Get in this house right now, or she will come and she will get you!' Her voice came out angrier than she felt, the tension in her chest belaying her concern. Nearby, a large serpent humanoid laughed to herself as she heard the mother's chide. In response to the mother's call, the creature listened to a rush of small footsteps running under the stone arch across the street. 'Yes, I will get you', she thought to herself with self-satisfaction. It was so long ago when Lamia had children of her own. Now, she only remembered that they were the cause of her devastating pain. No woman should have children—she would rid mothers of their burden. The evening was turning into night, and the colors of the day gradually faded to gray. Lamia emerged from behind the stone wall and licked her lips. She relished what was coming: it was her time to hunt.

Even in modern-day Greece, Lamia is a familiar character. She is referred to like a bogey monster to frighten children into doing as they are told. There is even a saying to describe the sudden death of a young child, which translates to 'strangled by Lamia.' In earlier times, parents feared Lamia so much that they gave their children amulets to wear to protect them from her. But before Lamia started devouring children in the night, there is a tale of beauty, jealousy, suffering, and madness.

The King of Libya had a mortal child named Lamia, although some sources say that Lamia was the daughter of Poseidon the sea god. Lamia grew into a beautiful young woman, enchanting to behold, and a queen of Libya. Zeus, from his home on Mount Olympus, saw her entralling beauty and was captivated by desire. Lamia became one of his many affairs, much to his wife Hera's displeasure. When she found out about yet another infidelity, Hera was overcome by jealous rage and sought vengeance.

By then, Zeus and Lamia had several children together; Hera was filled with resentment and punished Lamia severely. Hera endeavored to make all of Zeus' mistresses suffer, but Lamia received the worst treatment. She tricked Lamia into murdering her own children, in some Greek tales they even mention the idea that Lamia was cheated into eating her own offspring, which is where the idea of her being a child-eating monster stems from. Hera then cursed Lamia with insomnia so she would not even be able to see the children she had adored in her dreams. Lamia was plagued by visions of what had happened yet could find no respite in sleep. Driven mad by what Hera had put her through, she gouged out her own eyes. In some accounts, it was Zeus who took pity on Lamia and gave her the ability to remove her eyes at will so that she could find some relief from her unbearable torment.

In one account, a child of Zeus and Lamia is described, Herophile, who somehow survived this violent past well into adulthood and became a famous oracle. It is thought that Hera took her away from Lamia and that she was raised elsewhere, though she was presumed dead by her mother. Another child surviving in this way was Acheilus, a handsome yet conceited mortal boy. He challenged the goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite, to a contest because he was sure he was more beautiful than her. Aphrodite was outraged by his arrogance, and instead of taking part in the contest, she turned him into a shark-like sea monster.

Lamia could find no escape from her grief, and her insanity worsened. She began to steal and consume other people's children so others would know her heartache. Lamia could not bear to see other mothers happily surrounded by their children—something she had been so cruelly deprived of. The more children she murdered, the more grotesque Lamia's appearance became. She began to transform into a serpentine monster as a combination of the result of her horrific actions and Hera's curse.

Due to her monstrous nature, Lamia is often portrayed with the lower body of a snake. Famous painters of Lamia hint at this, such as Herbert James Draper, who depicts Lamia admiring a snake on her forearm while she is wearing a shed snakeskin draped around her human hips.

As time went on, Lamia's story morphed to include a race of nocturnal demons called Lamiae. They were partly serpent, each with the torso and head of a beautiful woman and the lower body and tail of a snake. Instead of preying on children, they seduced young men for their blood; thus, they are considered an ancient version of vampires. Although the story is different, it represents the same themes of desire and subsequent devastation. It is this idea of a serpentine seductress that John Keats used in his famous poem about Lamia, where he developed the concept of dangerous beauty and gratuitous hedonism.

In addition to Zeus' lust and Hera's jealousy, the story of Lamia represents the fear people have for their children's safety and that something so irreplaceably precious can be taken away. It also serves as a cautionary tale for parents to keep a watchful eye on their children. Not only did Lamia provide a way of explaining sudden infant death, but she also personifies an anxiety no doubt as old as parenthood itself.

As Hera's curse was an eternal one, Lamia may still roam the lands at night, hunting for children.

Chapter 20: Yamata no Orochi

Origin: Japanese Mythology



Ashinazuchi sat on the grassy banks of the river. His reflection rippled on the surface of the water; he was an old man now. What am I going to do? he thought. He looked over to his wife and daughters, huddled together by the house, and a soft sob escaped him. He felt helpless against the impending slaughter, just as he had been last year. Soon the earth would rumble, the birds would quiet, and the sun would be blotted out by an enormous serpent-like form. He knew the creature would appear over the horizon to consume another sacrifice, and that sacrifice would be one of his daughters.

Sure enough, the earth shook, and an eerie silence fell; he watched in horror as an eight-headed serpent appeared in the distance. It soared over the mountains heading slowly but surely for the village. Numb with fear and sickened with dread, Ashinazuchi heard his neighbors shouting in alarm as panic gripped the village. Ashinazuchi sat motionless as he saw the many heads sniffing the air in different directions, hunting for his next victim. The beast was enormous and looming ever larger as it approached, already casting a shadow over the whole valley and blocking out the sun. He heard the fear and despair in the cries of his family, and he felt ashamed anew of his powerlessness. He prayed for a miracle, some divine intervention, to save his daughter before it was too late. He knew there was nothing else he could do against the Yamata no Orochi.

The Yamata no Orochi is a giant legendary serpent, described in ancient Japanese texts known as the Kojiki dating back to 680 AD. It was said to have eight heads and eight tails and to have been so large that its body spanned eight hills and eight valleys. It had red eyes and a belly that was smeared with the blood of others. On its back grew forests of firs, winter cherry, club moss, Japanese cypress, and Japanese cedars.

In the famous story, Ashinazuchi and his wife Tenazuchi had seven daughters. Yamata no Orochi came every year demanding a sacrifice and devoured one of their beloved daughters until only the youngest, Kushinadahime, was left. Ashinazuchi had no hope of defeating such a beast by himself and, so far, his prayers had been unanswered.

On the day Yamata no Orochi came for Ashinazuchi's last remaining daughter, the storm god Susanoo had been expelled from the heavens for tricking his sister Amaterasu, who was the goddess of the sun. Walking by the river, Susanoo spotted some chopsticks floating in the water and realized that people must live further upstream. So he followed the river and found Ashinazuchi, with his wife and daughter, crying. Susanoo was moved by their plight and was determined to help the grief-stricken family.

Susanoo transformed Kushinadahime into a comb and put her in his hair to keep her safe from Yamata no Orochi. He then instructed Ashinazuchi and Tenazuchi to build a fence around their homestead with eight gates. At each gate, they placed a large vat of strong home-brewed sake. Then, they waited.

Just as Ashinazuchi had said, Yamata no Orochi was soon seen making its way to take Kushinadahime. Everyone hid out of sight and waited to see how the plan would unfold. As Susanoo had predicted, the monster could not resist the sake. It stuck one of its heads into each of the eight vats and drank greedily. The deadly serpent had not realized how strong the sake was; soon, he was drunkenly asleep on the ground.

Susanoo crept out from his hiding place with his sword drawn. He brought down his blade and killed the beast, chopping it into small pieces until the Hikawa River ran red with the serpent's blood. After mincing the dragon down to its fourth tail, Susanoo's sword broke as it bore down on something solid that glinted in the sun. It was the legendary sword Kusanagi no

Tsurugi which represents valor and virtue. Susanoo later presented the sword to his sister to make amends for their argument, and after their reconciliation, he was permitted to enter back into the heavens.

With Yamata no Orochi destroyed and his familial rift repaired, Susanoo transformed Kushinadahime back into her human form, and they were married. Then, Susanoo traveled around the Izumo region of Japan to find the perfect place to build his palace. When he found the ideal place in Suga, Susanoo was so moved that he recited a poem on the spot and began building his palace. When Susanoo and Kushinadahime's home was complete, they appointed Ashinazuchi as caretaker so the family could remain together free from the threat of Yamata no Orochi.

In present-day Japan, at the Suga Shrine, Susanoo's first poem has been carved onto a rock for all to read, immortalizing the hero who killed Yamata no Orochi. According to legend, Susanoo's poem is the origin of Japanese haiku poetry.

The blade found inside Yamata no Orochi's body, Kusanagi no Tsurugi, is one of the three Imperial Regalia of Japan. The sword was passed down from Amaterasu, the sun goddess, through the royal lineage and is rumored to remain at the Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya.

Susanoo's victory over Yamata no Orochi emphasizes the importance of bravery, virtue, and helping those in need. The valiant hero also shows us the necessity of building bridges after arguments, taking care of our family, and succeeding together. One final lesson from the legend of Susanoo and Yamata no Orochi is that art can spring from adversity, bringing beauty for centuries to follow.

Chapter 21: Bakunawa

Origin: Filipino Mythology



'Quick, it's starting Amado,' called Datu to his grandson. 'See how a bit of the moon is already missing?' Amado looked up to the shining orb that was full a moment ago; sure enough, it did look as though a bite had been taken out of it. 'Some of it has already been eaten!' Amado shouted aghast. Amado's grandmother bustled over with the pots and pans, 'Here, make as much noise as you can to scare the creature away,' she told Amado, handing him a pan and a wooden spoon. He and his grandfather stomped around the garden, banging their pans and shouting, 'Return our moon!' Amado's grandmother smiled as she watched them fondly. The commotion brought Amado's mother to the door, silhouetted by the light behind her. 'What a noise. Are you filling his head with stories again, Dad?' Amado's mother asked, her tone of voice making it clear to her parents that she didn't quite approve. 'Not stories, Mama, look! It worked!' replied Amado, delighted, 'Bakunawa didn't eat the moon—we made her spit it back out!'

Well-known throughout the Philippines is Bakunawa, the moon-eating dragon whose stories have been passed down through the generations by a rich oral tradition. The name is a compound word from 'curved' and 'snake.' Large reptiles are not uncommon in the Philippines, including monitor lizards and giant crocodiles, so it is a fitting mythological creature for this part of the world.

The story of Bakunawa is thought to have been influenced by tales of the Hindu god Rahu who turned into a demon. Rahu is often depicted as half-serpent and is said to cause eclipses by eating the sun or moon. In ancient times, Hindu mythology spread throughout South East Asia as people migrated along trade routes. Over time, these stories have been incorporated into Filipino mythology, enriching the character of Bakunawa.

Bakunawa is described as being a vast winged sea-serpent who can fly as well as swim. Her other physical features include

a long serpent-like body, enormous jaws as wide as a lake, a red tongue, gills, and whiskers.

There are many different variations of the myth depending on which part of the archipelago the story is from. However, an essential common thread is the existence of seven moons. These are often attributed to the days of the week, but this is likely a convenient simplification. In an ancient calendar from the area, seven lunar months correspond to agricultural work in the fields, with a different task being completed starting at each new moon. The seven moons of these seven lunar months have different names and represent various deities. Apart from the preceding moon marking the start of the seven significant moons, the other moons of the year are unnamed because they hold no agricultural significance. This makes it much more plausible that a different moon has its turn to shine each month. That is until Bakunawa succumbed to her weaknesses.

Once, the supreme god Bathala created seven moons; they were magnificent, and the people loved them and the light they gave. The beauty and light of the moons was Bathala's gift to the people. One of the moon deities was called Bulan. He was handsome, with luminous skin, gleaming dark hair, and deep brown eyes. One night he came down from the sky to swim in the sea. He was so striking that even the usually vicious mermaids were enamored and swam playfully with him.

But someone else had been admiring the moons, especially the handsome deity Bulan. Bakunawa, the sea goddess, was trying to catch Bulan's eye. Bulan didn't notice her, but Bakunawa was convinced that he had been unmoved by her beauty and ignored her. She thought he was only interested in the mermaids; Bakuanwa felt slighted. Her desire turned to envy and greed: if she couldn't have this moon, no one could. She turned herself into a monster to bite him right out of the sky. Sure enough, when Bulan returned to the sky, Bakunawa left the sea

and flew upwards, a towering, threatening figure. She ate the moon whole, but she was not satisfied for long. In the coming months, she rose into the sky and consumed the moons one by one until six of the seven moons had been devoured.

The people were growing increasingly desperate and did not want to lose the beauty and light of the last moon in existence. They appealed to the god Bathala, who planted bamboo on the moon so Bakunawa would not be able to swallow it in one go. The craters one can see on the surface of the moon today, are said to be the result of the bamboo Bathala planted. Bathala told the people what to do the next time the moon was under threat.

When the people saw the last moon starting to be eaten, they ran outside and made as much noise as possible to scare Bakunawa away. Some villages used loud drumming, some banged pots and pans, and others made beautiful soothing music to distract Bakunawa and send her to sleep.

Thus, Bakunawa was deterred from eating the last moon; she returned to the depths of the sea, where she guards the rift in the seafloor that is the opening to the underworld.

The story of Bakunawa is an example of mythology being used to explain natural phenomena, such as lunar eclipses. Her story reminds us that unchecked desires can turn ugly and that we should protect things that are important to us. Images of Bakunawa are used to symbolize determination, strength of will, and resilience, as whatever it takes, every so often, Bakunawa will try again to consume the last moon.

Chapter 22: Echidna

Origin: Greek Mythology



The traveler followed the hoof prints of his missing horses. The morning was too cold for such a miserable task. His horses wouldn't have wandered off in the night—they must have been stolen. It was hard to track them over the rocky terrain, but every so often, he found a recent hoof mark on the frosty ground. Why hadn't he heard anything in the night? Something didn't add up. After following the tracks for a time, he came across a large cluster of boulders; he noticed an opening in the ground between them. The trail of hoof prints disappeared, and he looked around, perplexed. Suddenly, a movement caught his eye: from out of the hole began to emerge a beautiful woman. Her glossy hair cascaded over her shoulders, her skin was smooth and fair, and her eyes were dark and enticing. He lost track of what he was doing there for a moment—he shook himself out of it—'Have you seen any horses?' he asked. He was waiting for the rest of this lovely creature to emerge from the boulders; he didn't wholly disapprove of the way she was looking at him. It made him forget to question what she was doing out here in the middle of nowhere. As she emerged, however, instead of legs, she had the body of a snake. An echidna! he thought, shocked but equally mesmerized.

'Horses? Yes, I've seen them. Come inside, and I'll tell you about them,' she replied in a voice that could not be disobeyed.

The earliest descriptions of Echidna tell of the torso and head of a beautiful young nymph who never grows old, with the lower body of a colossal viper. She had black eyes set in a fair face and long flowing hair. Venomous and fierce, Echidna had a voracious thirst for blood and, as a flesh-eating monster, could destroy mortals with ease. Echidna lived beneath the earth in a cave and preyed upon unsuspecting passersby, carrying them off and devouring them.

In the natural world, echidnas are named after Echidna in Greek mythology because they both have mammalian and reptilian features.

Echidna is said to symbolize the negative watery aspects of the Earth, like stagnant pools, decay, and disease. This aqueous element fits with her being a descendent of the primordial sea gods Ceto and Phorcys, as they symbolized the dangers of the deep, although some sources cite alternative parents.

As a powerful yet beautiful monster, she also represents the perceived threat of strong, attractive women in the patriarchal society of ancient Greece. Echidna was described as unmanageable, indicating a strong, independent character. Because she bore many children, she most noticeably represents creation and potentiality, and in a broader sense, the cause of disorder in nature.

Echidna found a suitable companion to match her power in Typhon, the many-headed dragon, son of Gaia and Tartarus. Echidna and Typhon lived together in their subterranean home and had a growing family. The partnership of Echidna and Typhon mirrors that of Zeus and his wife Hera, and the feud between them had repercussions for generations.

It is her offspring that Echidna is most well known for, and the reason she is called the mother of monsters. Echidna and Typhon's first two children were the multi-headed dogs with serpent tails, Orthrus and Cerberus. Following these two brutal brothers were the Hydra, a regenerating multi-headed serpent; the Chimera, a lion-goat-snake hybrid; and the Sphinx, part woman, part winged lion. As time went on, multiple writers associated more creatures to the mother of monsters.

On the surface, Echidna may merely appear to be a convenient character to attribute monstrous offspring to because she does not have a prominent role in famous myths. However, most of these myths do involve her children or grandchildren. While Echidna herself avoided being the main opponent to any heroes, there is one story where 'an echidna' matches her description very closely.

On the way home from his tenth labor, Hercules was lured by a cave-dwelling echidna while looking for his missing horses that she had stolen and hidden. The echidna was half beautiful maiden and half snake and told Hercules that he could have his horses back if he stayed with her for a while. Thus, she bore three sons, Agathyrus, Gelonus, and Scythes, who she brought up in the cave after she eventually allowed Hercules to leave with his horses. All three sons went on to be the fathers of mortal tribes, and the youngest son, Scythes, became the king of Scythia.

It is likely that this story was intended to warn against beautiful and intelligent women, like Echidna herself, and that these characteristics were somehow undesirable or unnatural. This is emphasized by the stark contrast between the womanly torso and snake body.

Perhaps Echidna was smart enough to avoid the limelight but was nonetheless a powerful driving force behind her children and her husband Typhon in his tirade against the Olympian gods. As history has been known to forget the influence of great women, maybe mythology has forgotten the influence of a great female monster. While details of Echidna are limited, her effects are felt throughout many of the most famous Greek myths.

Chapter 23: Jörmungandr

Origin: Norse Mythology



The spring had not come, nor the summer; only winter following winter. There was thick sea ice where there had never been before. Icy winds blasted the world of men, and the ground suddenly rumbled. Underneath the ice, in the bowels of the cold ocean, writhed the large Midgard serpent, and he had grown restless waiting. The never-ending winter indicated one thing to the monster: now was the time. He launched himself upwards with explosive strength, blasting straight through the thick ice, sending gigantic chunks sailing through the air. He flung his humongous body onto the land in one colossal leap, causing an earthquake strong enough to break all chains, releasing all who had been bound. Those who saw him were terrified; they knew Ragnarok had come at last and tried to run. With his mouth gaping wide, the awoken serpent spat forth a spray of black venom that none who crossed his path had escaped from; their half-formed screams dying in their throats. Now Jörmungandr would join his kin and bring the end to the time of the gods.

Jörmungandr is the son of the trickster god Loki and the giantess Angrboda (meaning ‘she who bodes anguish’). Thus, Jörmungandr’s siblings are Fenrir, the giant wolf, and Hel, the girl of life and death. All three are foretold to have an important role to play during the apocalyptic battle of Ragnarok.

When the god Odin found out about these secret monstrous offspring, he had them brought to Asgard. Odin had received a prophecy that his death would come at Fenrir’s jaws. But while Odin was trying to change his fate, his actions only sealed it.

Jörmungandr was flung into the sea by Odin, and with nothing to limit his growth, grew so large that he could completely encircle Midgard, the land of men. In contrast to his siblings, Jörmungandr is much more animalistic and always made his violent tendencies known by spitting venom at the gods, notably Thor. The gods doubted that they could tame Jörmungandr’s brother Fenrir so they bound him with a cord from

which he could not escape. Their sister Hel was sent to rule over the underworld, where she maintained diplomatic relations with both the dead and the living—until one day, she too would choose sides.

Belief in a giant sea serpent is a common feature of ancient coastal communities, and Norse mythology is no exception. The tale of Jörmungandr likely started out as a legend to explain violent seas, tidal waves, or earthquakes. Norse people lived by the sea, gathered food from it, and are famous for traveling across it, so this accounts for Jörmungandr's popularity in ancient times.

There are several surviving carved picture stones featuring Jörmungandr in Sweden, Denmark, and Northern England from around the 8th to 10th Centuries. There is some consensus that these stones portray Thor and Jörmungandr on a particularly memorable fishing trip. If the interpretation of the stones is correct, this means that the same legend had been told for hundreds of years before it was ever written down in the *Prose Edda*, showing just how well-loved it was.

Thor had gone fishing with the giant Hymir. Considering Thor had brought the head of Hymir's most prized ox to use as bait, the trip had not gotten off to a great start. However, they continued, and Hymir proudly caught two enormous whales for dinner before Thor had even cast off. Thor rowed them out to deeper water while Hymir argued that they should return home with their catch. As Thor undoubtedly intended, his choice of bait proved to be perfect for hooking Jörmungandr the Midgard serpent. The mighty Thor hauled Jörmungandr towards them while the serpent writhed and resisted, causing horrendous waves. As Jörmungandr's head breached the sea's surface, it spat poison at Thor but narrowly missed. Thor pulled Jörmungandr closer and reached for his hammer to finish him off. Hymir, terrified that Thor was about to start Ragnarok, cut the

line, and Jörmungandr disappeared back under the waves. Hymir begged that they go back to shore. Thor and Jörmungandr would meet again, and they had both sworn to kill each other.

During Ragnarok, Jörmungandr and Thor will come face to face for the final time. There is no escaping this fate. Thor will kill Jörmungandr with his hammer, but before he can take ten steps away, on the ninth step, he will fall, Jörmungandr's poison having beaten him at last.

During the time of the Vikings, Jörmungandr's extraordinary length was emphasized by saying he could reach around the whole of Midgard and grasp its own tail in its mouth. Accordingly, there has been much commentary on Jörmungandr being an example of an ouroboros, a circular serpent symbol prevalent in much of the ancient world, most famously Egypt. It represents the circle of life, death, and rebirth. As Jörmungandr represents the beginning of the end, after which the world will be repopulated, this does seem to be an appropriate parallel.

In recent times, inspiration has been drawn from Jörmungandr in Marvel's *Thor* series, games such as *God of War*, and fantasy writers like Neil Gaiman.

But for now, Jörmungandr will remain under the sea until he arises to signal the beginning of the end and trigger Ragnarok. Because the gods are unable to prevent Ragnarok, despite their attempts, Jörmungandr symbolizes predetermination and destiny, in addition to the violent dangers of the deep.

Section Five | The Unusual Ungulates

Ungulates are any animal with hooves, such as horses, cows, and boars. Ungulates certainly enabled human civilization to spread around the globe, so it is no wonder they are prominent in myth and folklore.

The most commonly featured ungulate by far is the horse. Domesticated around 6000-5500 BC, horses from myth and folklore are rich in symbolism and meaning. Striking in appearance, horses almost universally symbolize power and freedom because they gave advantage in battle and allowed freedom of movement.

While other ungulates are also domesticated, horses are often seen to serve humans more by choice due to their intelligence and the free spirit they retain. Thus, they lend us their speed, strength, and courage with cooperation and companionship. However, sometimes this speed leads to danger, like the Cheval Mallet from French folklore.

White horses are prevalent in mythology worldwide, often symbolizing purity and heroism worthy of the gods; for example, the Norse god Odin rode an eight-legged white horse, Sleipnir. In direct contrast, human-horse hybrid creatures often represent the wild and lustful side of human nature.

Some of the most well-known mythological creatures of all are equine-inspired, namely Pegasus, the winged stallion, and centaurs, the half horse-half human warriors. Both of these are from Greek mythology, and in this section you will find out about the creatures that preceded centaurs, ipotanes, and a horse no doubt inspired by Pegasus in Islamic tradition, Haizum.

Unicorns, in particular, seem to hold a timeless fascination. You will find several horned mythological creatures in this section, such as the Philippine Anggitay and the Slavic Indrik. Equine-inspired creatures remain ubiquitous in modern culture—such is their ability to capture the imagination.

Chapter 24: Anggitay

Origin: Filipino Mythology



As soon as the rain stopped, the rainbow the creature had been waiting for appeared. It formed a multi-colored bridge for her to trot across, provided for her by the rainbow god, Barangaw. Well, at least someone appreciates my beauty, she thought.

With the breeze lifting her mane, the creature traveled to Earth, rainbow colors shimmering beneath her golden hooves. She could avoid the Golden Goddess if she went now, while the grass was wet and water was still dripping from the trees.

She stepped off the rainbow and onto the wet forest floor; getting her hooves muddy was worth it if she could find what she was looking for. In a puddle, she saw her reflection. If only she could get her body back, she knew she would be more beautiful than the Golden Goddess again. She was convinced that the Golden Goddess was jealous of her; that was why she was turned into a monster. Then she saw it, the familiar flash of gold through the trees. Anggitay needed that treasure to pay the Golden Goddess to transform her back to her old self. And off she galloped, skidding through the forest with a glint in her eye.

There are limited records of Anggitay, and at first, accounts appear to be contradictory. This is not uncommon in Filipino mythology as different islands had different beliefs, mythologies, and languages. One report from the Batanga region described a creature that was half beautiful young woman and half bedraggled mare. The beast, thought to be Anggitay, sat up in the boughs of a tree watching passersby.

Other accounts describe a race of beings, anggitays, which could hide up in trees, taking this idea from the Batanga sighting. Anggitays worked together to ambush travelers and steal their jewelry or gold. This does not seem to be grounded in tradition but appears to be a more modern development. However, the link to obtaining gold and jewelry, even by theft, matches a myth from the Visayan region, which appears in personal records from

oral tradition. The Visayan myth is about the origin of Anggitay, and the fact that it involves some well-known Visayan deities adds to its credibility.

Originally the daughter of a datu, a regional monarch, Anggitay had the head and upper body of a woman and the legs and body of a horse, like a female centaur. She had an ivory horn in the middle of her forehead, not unlike a unicorn, and golden hooves.

Two Visayan deities were involved in the creation of Anggitay. One was the Golden Goddess, Burigadang Pada Sinaklang Bulawan, the goddess of gold and greed. She punishes people who are greedy for riches, especially if they are thieves. The Golden Goddess is stunningly beautiful and attended to by adoring dwarves. To illustrate her style of justice, she was once tricked into losing a beauty contest to a fairy whom she promptly stamped on and turned into an insect.

Barangaw is the Visayan god of the rainbow. He symbolizes luck, victory in battle, and hope in the face of adversity. He causes rainbows to appear, which enable travel between the heavens and Earth, an idea common in various mythologies. Bangaraw and the Golden Goddess were opposing forces in the story of Anggitay.

A royal datu had a beautiful daughter named Angga, meaning 'love' in Visayan. Though she was fair and attractive to look upon, she loved to adorn herself with precious jewelry, whether it was hers or not. The god of the rainbow, Barangaw, spent much of his time watching and admiring her.

Princess Angga was walking one day when she saw dwarves carrying bags of gold and jewelry through the Golden Goddess' sacred grove. *'Who does this belong to?'* she asked covetously. The dwarves replied that it belonged to the 'fairest of the Earth's children.' As she was vain and conceited, Princess Angga

thought that this must surely be her. She went back to the village and instructed everyone to make her a bejeweled golden throne and carry her back to the grove on it.

In a flash of golden light, the Golden Goddess appeared before Princess Angga, enraged at her vanity and arrogance. The villagers turned to flee from the furious goddess, but she transformed them into yellow field mice. The Golden Goddess cursed Angga for thinking herself more beautiful than the gods: stamping on her toes with her golden slippers turned Angga's feet into golden hooves. Then, she took off one golden slipper and hit Angga on the forehead with it; an ivory horn promptly grew there. The curse spread and began to turn all of Angga into an ugly old mare. Barangaw took pity on Angga and tried to reverse the Golden Goddess' curse, but he only managed to restore Angga's face and upper body. The rest of Angga would remain as a horse until she could find seven sacks of gold to give the Golden Goddess in return for her previous form. However, the Golden Goddess ensured this would never happen: she threw gold dust into Angga's eyes, finishing off her transformation into Anggitay. The gold dust in her eyes made Anggitay see the glint of gold wherever she looked, even though there was none.

Barangaw gave Anggitay the ability to travel across the rainbow and find refuge there. He continues to send Anggitay rainbows after the rain so she can come back and seek her gold. However, she is destined to remain Anggitay forever, tricked into seeing gold that is not there as a punishment for her vanity and greed.

Chapter 25: Arion

Origin: Greek Mythology



Polynices should have been pleased that his father-in-law had lent him his horse for the chariot race. To have the fastest ever horse pulling his chariot should have brought him confidence, but instead, he felt anxious. Yes, the black-maned horse was the swiftest horse anyone had ever seen, but he had an unruly temperament. His father-in-law had given him so much advice about handling the horse that it now rattled around his mind, detached from meaning. He tried to remember: calm him, don't shout at him, and don't let him run off the reins, but don't pull hard on them either, never urge him to go faster... That had not helped: now he felt nauseous. The horse stamped his hooves and tossed his head nervously, unsettling the other horses in line. Polynices got a distinct impression the horse knew he was not his master and was unimpressed.

The mappa cloth fell, and the race began. Polynices claimed the lead with ease, the chariot thundering over the ground faster than he thought possible. Then suddenly, the horse skidded to a halt and reared high, striking out with his front legs, his black mane whipping the air. Before Polynices could understand what had happened, he was flung backward from the chariot. He hit the ground heavily and rolled several times, fearing he was about to get trampled to death by his competitors. Luckily, they had gained such a lead that he was spared from a grizzly end. While he tried to stagger to his feet, he saw the snake apparition that had caused the commotion, and beyond that, already crossing the finish line with an empty chariot: the fastest ever horse, Arion.

Black-maned Arion is a horse of exceptional speed, sure to win any chariot race because of his divine origins. In the *Iliad*, Homer famously said that no one could catch up, level with, or overtake you if Arion was pulling your chariot. His name comes from the word for 'braver,' and he is likely considered immortal because he was born of gods.

The majority of sources name Poseidon, the sea god, and Demeter, the goddess of agriculture, as Arion's parents.

Alternatives are Gaia, the Earth, or Zephyros, god of the west wind, and a Harpy, although Demeter is said to have spent some time in the guise of a Harpy as well. There is also one story that Poseidon created Arion in a contest with Athena to make something useful for mortals. However, the most commonly accepted account is that Poseidon lusted after Demeter, who turned herself into a mare to disguise herself from him and avoid his pursuit. She hid among a herd of horses owned by Oncius, the god Apollo's son who bred horses. However, Poseidon recognized her even as a mare and turned himself into a stallion and mated with her without her consent.

Occasionally, Arion is shown with wings in modern depictions, but this could be due to the influence of Pegasus being his half-brother. One later Roman poet, Propertius, said Arion could speak, but it seems to be a creative embellishment that is not consistent with earlier accounts.

Arion had three main masters, Oncius, then Hercules, and finally Adrastus; the latter was made the most famous owner by the detailed accounts of Arion by the poet Statius. Statius gave the most insight into Arion's character and said that his passion to be moving could not be satisfied and that he was as 'changeful as a winter sea.'

In the lands belonging to Oncius, who had many horses, the colt Arion was born to the goddess Demeter. Arion had one sister, Despoina, a fertility goddess. Legend has it that the hero Hercules asked Oncius to give him his fastest horse, Arion, to help him during battle; Oncius agreed. But even for Hercules, Arion was feisty and hard to handle.

After the battle, Hercules gave Arion to Adrastus, the King of Argos. He became Arion's most notable owner and managed to tame Arion to some degree. Adrastus' daughter was married to Polynices, a prince in exile from the kingdom of Thebes, where his brother had taken the throne from him. Adrastus promised to

help his son-in-law reclaim the throne. Accompanied by Arion, Adrastus took a large army led by seven champions to claim the kingdom of Thebes for Polynices. This assault became known as the Seven against Thebes.

On the way to Thebes, the inaugural Nemean Games was held as a memorial event for a child, and it included a chariot race. Arion competed in the race, and although he crossed the finish line first, he had thrown Polynices from the chariot and was disqualified. The god Apollo had interfered by spooking Arion with a snake apparition, causing Polynices to fall; thus, Apollo's favored competitor won without outpacing Arion.

When King Adrastus and his seven champions reached the kingdom of Thebes, there was a bloodbath. The seven champions all perished in the battle that ensued. Polynices and his brother fought each other for the throne, and both died at each other's hands. Adrastus would have surely died too if it was not for his faithful horse Arion who carried him away, easily faster than anyone could pursue them.

Arion lived on and had at least one son, a warhorse who belonged to the warrior Sthenelous who fought in the battle of Troy. Arion represents the archetypal horse, symbolizing victory in competition, bravery in battle, speed to escape your enemies, and a free, unbroken spirit.

Chapter 26: Buraq

Origin: Islamic MYTHOLOGY



The prophet sat with their eyes closed as their mind wandered. They saw a place of peace and purity and sensed unseen beings. A slight sound, like the rustle of a bird's wing, caught the prophet's attention. Ordinarily, nothing would disturb the prophet's thoughts, so they were surprised by the sensation of coming back to their body and opening their eyes. The afternoon light silhouetted a figure who had not been there before. 'I am Gabriel,' said the figure's voice, only, it was inside the prophet's mind. 'Do not be afraid. You have a journey to undertake, and I have brought you the means by which you will travel.' The prophet was too awed to speak.

Gabriel lifted an outstretched hand: in his palm, there was a miniature carving of a horse. Still unable to speak, the prophet searched Gabriel's face for an explanation, but it was so dazzling no answers could be seen there. Looking back to the horse figurine, it was now larger than it had been before. It was white with multi-colored wings, and as it continued to grow, the prophet saw it had a charming human face. Still growing, with a swish of its peacock-feathered tail, it stepped down from Gabriel's hand. By the time it touched the ground, it was life-sized, with a decorated crown on its head. 'Get on,' said Gabriel's voice kindly. The prophet knew this was going to be an epic journey—on the back of the glorious Buraq.

From the Arabic word 'to flash' and the middle Persian word for 'a mount,' Buraq was a flying steed that enabled prophets to complete impossible journeys. Rather than a definite myth that became more obscure with time, Buraq is the opposite, crystallizing over the centuries. At first merely alluded to, Buraq has gradually taken shape, and gender, over time.

Across the Islamic world, in parts of Africa and Persia especially, Buraq was a popular subject in folk art. Originally, Persian descriptions of Buraq did not express whether Buraq was male or female due to the gender-neutral language.

Subsequently, carvings and figurines of Buraq compensated for this, depicting Buraq's human face with exquisite femininity. The first indication of Buraq's human face was a reference to a 'smooth cheek,' and it took off from there.

In the 16th Century, Buraq was referred to as a mixed hybrid creature with a human face, wings, and features from camel, donkey, elephant, and ox. Some accounts give Buraq a peacock-feathered tail, fine jewelry, or leopard spots, making a definitive description of what Buraq would have initially looked like less distinct. Crucially, some of these descriptions caught on more than others, and it was a human face, a white horse's body, and multi-colored wings that really captivated people.

Buraq was first mentioned by writers retelling the Prophet Muhammad's miraculous journey in a single night, called the Night Journey story, or *Isra'*. To make it possible to visit many sacred sites in one night, the angel Gabriel gave Buraq to Muhammad to enable travel at lightning speed.

The Quran alludes to the Night Journey story, with most scholars interpreting it as a journey to Jerusalem, but some as a journey to heaven. This has led to the Night Journey story (*Isra'*) and the story of Muhammad's ascent to heaven (*Mi'raj*) often being merged together in accounts of Muhammad's life and sayings. As one of the most popular stories in Islam, it has captured the heart and imagination of many poets and writers and led to traditional elaborations of the Night Journey story. It is these stories that first breathed life into Buraq and resulted in many beautiful paintings of Muhammad ascending to heaven on the magnificent Buraq. Incidentally, the journey itself, and therefore Buraq, are sometimes considered a dream or vision rather than a physical journey, but nonetheless of great spiritual significance.

Gabriel appeared to Muhammad, waking him from sleep, and brought him Buraq; a white beast, saddled and bridled. Its size

was between that of a donkey and a mule, and with each step, it could reach as far as the eye could see.

At first, Buraq shied from Muhammad, but Gabriel explained that this was a rider most honorable to God and Buraq broke out in a sweat in response. Muhammad rode Buraq from Mecca to Jerusalem, stopping at many sacred sites on the way—an impossible feat achieved only with Buraq's lightning speed.

When they arrived at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, Gabriel pointed to a spot on the Western Wall, and a crack appeared in the rock. To this day, this part of the wall is called the Buraq Wall because it is where Muhammad dismounted and tied Buraq. Muhammad then continued his journey by ascending a shimmering ladder to heaven, guided by Gabriel. After returning to Earth, Buraq took Muhammad safely back to Mecca—before the same night was over.

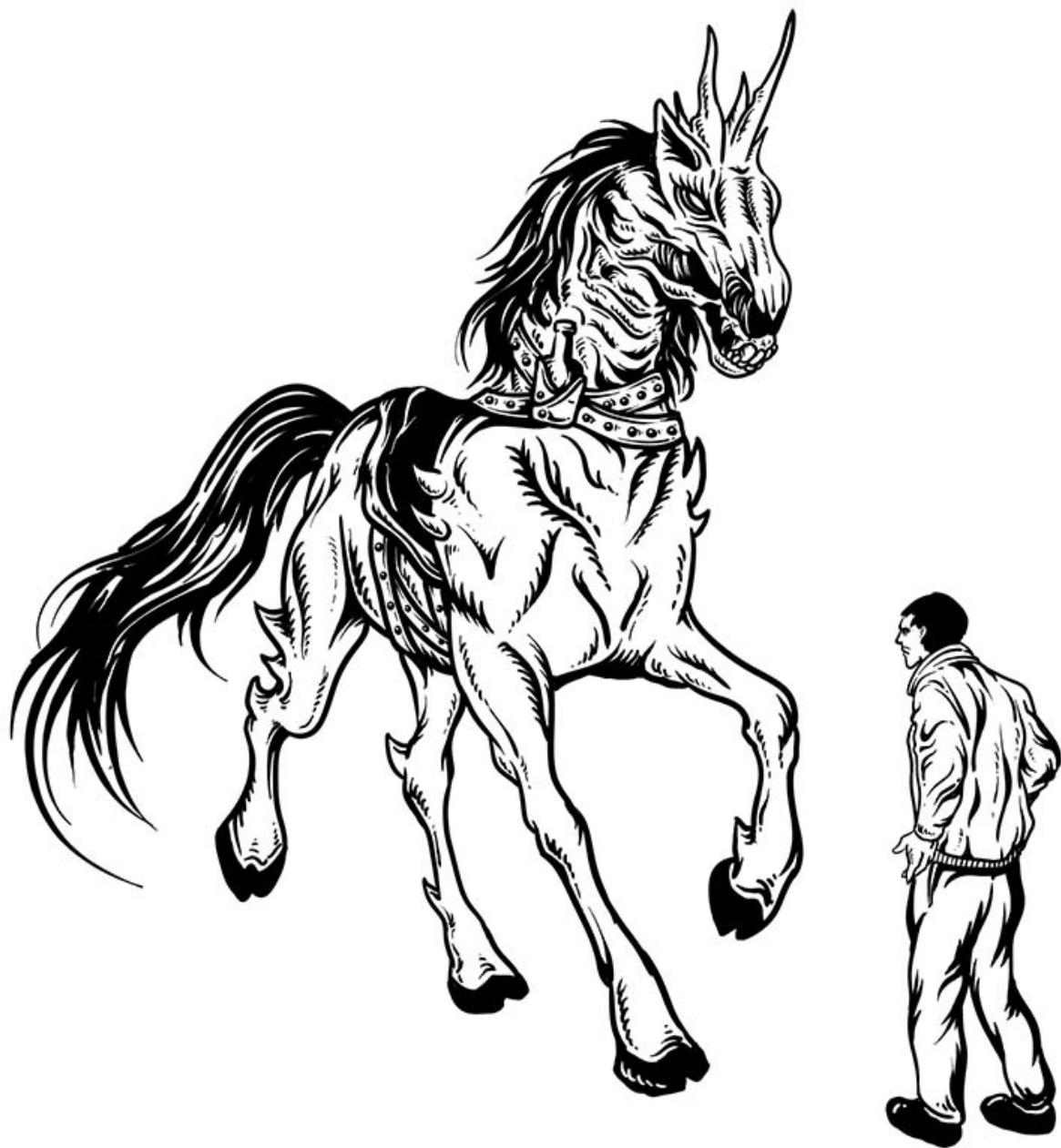
As it is popular to combine the two stories, Buraq is commonly included in the ascent to heaven instead of the ladder. Because Muhammad had been through a difficult time in his life when he met Buraq, she can represent a silver lining to our hardships and makes the impossible possible.

In the modern world, Buraq has lent her name—and connotations of piety and speed—to airlines, bus companies, unmanned drones, and high-speed rail services.

Buraq has become considered female over time, but she differs from many other mythological woman-animal hybrids because she is not sexualized in any way. Rather than a virginal purity, Buraq, with her gleaming white body to transport the worthy, was meant to represent purity in its broadest sense.

Chapter 27: Cheval Mallet

Origin: French Folklore



It had grown late; the weary traveler trudged along the dirt track. The grey evening had turned into a dark, cloudy night, and already the mist was rolling in. It was becoming hard to see even his hand in front of his face, and every so often, he would end up in the hedge at the side of the road. But he had been delayed, and there was no alternative but to walk. A fine drizzle started to fall, making him feel instantly chilled in the frigid night air. He longed for even the tiniest bit of moonlight to see by, but there was none. He suddenly splashed into a puddle, cursing his luck; now, his feet were wet, making him feel all the more miserable.

As he shook the water from his shoes, he heard a gentle snicker. He nearly jumped out of his skin, but he came across a horse, almost walking into it, and immediately felt reassured. The horse was lying down, as if waiting, by the side of the road. It had a saddle and bridle on and was looking towards him as if it recognized him. He called out, 'Hello?' unsure where the owner could possibly be at this time of night. Maybe he could borrow the horse and bring it back in the morning, after dry socks and a warm bed. The traveler reasoned that the horse would be able to see better than he could in this darkness, and at least it would save him from falling into any more puddles. He stroked the horse's warm neck; it seemed perfectly friendly, and he climbed into the saddle.

When the locals found the traveler in the morning, there was nothing but a trampled body in the ditch and some oddly shaped hoof marks nearby. They knew the Cheval Mallet had been again and claimed the poor man's soul.

In the area around Lac de Grand-Lieu, in the west of France, there are stories of an evil horse that appears to weary travelers on moonless nights. The horse is usually said to be as white as the mists, but occasionally it is a black horse that appears. This has led some to attribute magical powers to the Cheval Mallet,

saying that this mysterious horse can change its color at will, perhaps even to avoid being identified.

The Cheval Mallet looks beautiful and serene, fully equipped with a bridle and a comfortable-looking saddle. It may even have offered extra assistance to mount by kneeling down to coax the tired traveler onto its back. However, appearances can be deceiving: the helpful, attractive exterior disguised malicious intent.

If a traveler accepted a ride from the Cheval Mallet and climbed into the saddle, the horse would immediately take off at a terrifying speed. Smoke would curl from its nostrils, and its previously docile eyes would gleam like fire. It would continue to gallop all night, tearing through the countryside, wild with fury. As morning approached, the Cheval Mallet, now looking nothing like the serene beast the traveler had initially laid eyes on, would throw the exhausted rider and trample them to death. A favorite of the Cheval Mallet was to unseat the rider and toss them down a ravine or into the lake. The battered victim had no chance of survival and always gave in to death.

The origin of the Cheval Mallet was likely to explain mysterious deaths of lone travelers or as an answer for finding a body in strange circumstances. It is not inconceivable that people believed they saw a strange horse in the mist on a dark night as their eyes perhaps played tricks on them, perpetuating the story.

Inspired by the story of the Cheval Mallet was a military feast and carnival held in the 17th Century involving actors, with at least one being dressed as the dreaded horse. But the event was banned by the ecclesiastical authorities and subsequently forgotten. More recently, the story has inspired a game, and a folk song called *La Ballade du Cheval Mallet* by Tri Yann.

The only way that you could protect yourself from the Cheval Mallet was to carry an appropriate talisman. If you had six coins

marked with a cross, you could throw them in front of the Cheval Mallet as soon as you saw it, and it would be forced to stop; if you were lucky, you would have time for a hasty escape. Crossing yourself was considered a helpful addition, but the best form of protection was a medal or cross of Saint Benedict, the patron saint of Europe, which would protect you from evil, including rendering you safe from the Cheval Mallet. There is even a story that with courage and the protection of Saint Benedict, someone was once able to subdue the Cheval Mallet and command it to take them on a trip to Paris.

The Cheval Mallet is thought to symbolize a murderous psychopomp, a manifestation not only guiding the soul from this world into the next but taking the life in the first place. In traditional French folklore, the moral of the story is to never get on a strange horse and always be prepared with something useful in your pocket. If you do accept a ride from an unknown horse on a moonlit night, you may never return.

Chapter 28: Haizum

Origin: Islamic Mythology



The soldier knew their army was outnumbered, but facing him was a single opponent launching a fierce attack with his sword. The soldier only just managed to block the strike. He shifted his feet, ready to counterstrike, but when he thrust his sword, it met air. To his surprise, his opponent, so determined to kill him a moment ago, had suddenly turned to flee. The soldier roared and raced after him with his sword aloft. Fleetingly, the soldier thought he heard the pounding hooves, but the air trembled instead of the ground. A stranger's voice called out, 'Forward, Haizum!' from somewhere above his right shoulder, but no one was there. He couldn't help thinking, my name isn't Haizum. He refocused on his quarry; he had nearly caught him.

As the soldier ran, an errant gust of wind blasted him with dust. He heard the crack of a whip, and wiping sand from his face, saw his quarry crumple to the ground. When he reached him, he saw his face was sliced open, from one temple, across his nose, to the opposite cheek. The wound was red raw at the edges but sickeningly discolored where the flesh gaped, as if it was already infected with some strange poison. Again, he looked around, but there was no one to be seen, only the enemy retreating behind a rolling cloud of dust: he couldn't believe his eyes. 'Forward Haizum...' he whispered to himself, and with a flash of realization, '...Haizum is the horse of an angel!'

According to Islamic traditional writings, elaborations based on the Quran, Haizum is the horse of the archangel Gabriel, a gift from God for being a faithful servant. Haizum is of pure white skin to the point that he appears luminous to those lucky enough to see him.

Haizum is a fitting mount for an angel because he can travel between cosmic planes instantaneously with his large, white, feathered wings. This enables Gabriel to pass on divine messages to prophets, including the Prophet Muhammad. Apparently, Haizum was chosen for Gabriel because he was the most intelligent animal in the universe. This highlights the cultural

significance of horses and how intelligent they were considered to be, offering valuable assistance to humans and angels alike.

In the Battle of Badr, Muslim troops numbering just over three hundred faced one thousand Quraysh, a mercantile Arab tribe and staunch opponents of Muhammad and his religious message. Moreover, the Muslim army only had two horses, and the enemy had many. Muhammad, who was leading the Muslim troops, was distressed that they were so severely outnumbered and prayed fervently to God that they would not all be slaughtered and Islam wiped out before it had truly begun. His prayers were answered as one thousand angels were sent to secure their victory.

Muhammad saw a great sandstorm roll through the valley during the battle, though there was no wind and the ground was soaked from heavy rain the previous night. He saw Gabriel, the angel of revelation, mounted on his white horse Haizum leading half of the angels into battle. The angel Michael, the field commander of the angels, led the other half. Gabriel's battle cry could be heard, 'Forward Haizum!' as they rode the waves of dust, and no hooves touched the ground. The Quraysh turned their backs and began to flee; those who were not quick enough were trampled. Now Muhammad knew he would be victorious and his followers would survive. Due to the aid of the mounted angels, they lived to show mercy to their prisoners.

Another traditional story is that of the Golden Calf, which is mentioned in the Quran. While Moses was away fasting and praying, some of his followers grew restless awaiting his return and were filled with doubt. One of his followers, named Samiri, persuaded the other Israelites that Moses had deserted them and was not coming back. Samiri convinced everyone to give him their gold coins and jewelry, which he then melted down to make a golden calf. He had some dust from under the hooves of Haizum, and he threw it into the calf's mouth, making it seem as

if it was partly alive. Such was the power of the dust. The Israelites were amazed and worshiped the golden calf when Samiri claimed that this was their guiding god.

Moses returned and asked Samiri why he had done this. He replied that he was responding to the inclination of his soul when he threw Haizum's dust. After some discussion, and other mishaps, everyone prayed for forgiveness for worshipping a false idol.

By the time Islam was created, the time of Greek mythology had passed, the gods forgotten, and only Greek philosophical and scientific texts were translated in the Islamic world. However, a white, winged horse had been immortalized in the stars. The constellation of Pegasus was familiar in the early Islamic world and had the name of Faras al-Azam, meaning 'great horse.' Astronomy and astrology were culturally valued, so the white, winged horse was incorporated into Islamic tradition. There is a stunning Iranian luster bowl from the late 12th Century showing a winged horse, the very likeness of Haizum, considered to be derived from Pegasus.

Haizum has the crucial task of transporting the angel Gabriel with his divine messages. He also represents an explanation for sandstorms, which look like they have been whipped up by angels or stampeding horses. Though known by different names, the white, winged horse remains one of the most recognizable mythological creatures in the world.

Chapter 29: Ipotane

Origin: Greek Mythology



Silens stood away from the stage, leaning on a donkey for support, listening to the audience roar with laughter at some crude innuendo in the play. The townspeople were gathered for the Dionysian festival; they flocked to enjoy the comedies and tragedies, where music played and wine flowed. Silenus went to take another swig of wine from his jug and laughed at the hint of his own reflection. He was older now: he saw a stubby nose, full lips, and balding head with long pointed ears. He knew if he looked down, he would see his once muscular physique softened and spread like bread dough. How times had changed since his youthful days in the forest; he barely recognized the face rippling back at him.

The god Dionysus swaggered over, marveling at the festivities being held in his name. 'Silenus, my tutor and companion, answer me this,' he boomed, proffering his jug of wine. 'Are you well enough inebriated to share your arcane knowledge of the future with me?'

'Well, Dionysus, my dear student,' Silenus began. 'I have imbibed liberally, so listen and listen well...' He took a steady breath and flicked his tail, ready to begin: he had so much secret wisdom he would only tell a little; he was an ipotane after all.

Ipotanes were male human-horse hybrids with a human body, horse's ears and tail, and sometimes a single pair of horse's legs. In ancient Greece, ipotanes were portrayed unclothed and were considered nature spirits. While some early versions of ipotanes walked upright on two horse legs, other depictions had human legs. Ipotanes sometimes have the equine facial features of a flattened nose and mane-like hair. They are considered the origin of several human-animal hybrids: satyrs, men with some horse features; centaurs, a human torso on a four-legged horse body; and fauns, a man with the two legs of a goat. Some

ipotanes are depicted as muscular with a head of luscious curly hair, while others are older and balding. Linguistically, ipotane suggests translations from the Greek words for 'knights' and 'horse-people.' As knights often rode horses, this could be one explanation of how these mythical creatures came into existence.

The most well-documented incarnation of ipotanes is the satyr, associated with Dionysus, the god of wine and theatre. Dionysus represents good times and celebration, and the satyr-type ipotanes are shown as being older, balding, often drunk on wine, and staggering on their human legs. Pottery dating back to the 6th Century BC shows satyrs playing musical instruments and drinking wine from large skins. The satyrs of Dionysus are always shown anatomically exaggerated and sexually aroused. They were renowned for their satyr plays in which they acted as the comic relief, known for their rude wordplay, innuendo, and lewd jokes.

The satyrs that accompanied the god Dionysus were called the Sileni in ancient Greece. Over the course of history, the plural was dropped, and instead, one single satyr was characterized: Silenus. A host of satyrs continued to accompany Silenus and Dionysus, playing musical instruments, drinking, and generally being raucous and raunchy. While celebrating, they could whip themselves into a destructive frenzy, leading to trampled crops and food looted from villages.

Satyrs also had unrestrained animalistic desire when it came to women, both nymph and human. Although satyrs loved women, their wild and rambunctious behavior meant that women did not always love them back. A rejected satyr did not always take 'no' for an answer, so they also represented uncontrolled lust and the subjugation of women.

Silens was considered the father of the satyrs and a friend, companion, and tutor to the god Dionysus. When Silenus had drunk enough wine to be inebriated, it is said that he would share

knowledge of the arcane and tell prophecies of the future. This characteristic stemmed from the conviction that ipotanes possessed great wisdom, if only they could be persuaded to share it.

Possessing hidden knowledge is a concept that has been passed on from ipotanes to centaurs. Though ipotanes are considered the origin of centaurs, their personalities are very different from satyrs. While centaurs are seen as noble warriors of the forest, satyrs are rambunctious and slovenly. On the one hand, they could be the life of the party, but on the other, they were vulgar and crude, unlike centaurs.

Over time, some of the animalistic qualities of satyrs stopped being taken so literally, and they were instead depicted as human men with their beastly demeanor, after having too much to drink, being more metaphorical. Describing a satyr as a man with animalistic behavior allows someone something of an excuse for someone who may have disgraced themselves the night before. They were merely a beastly satyr, attending Dionysus, their god of merriment and revelry, and things got a little out of control.

The next incarnation of the ipotane was in Roman times when, by then, the satyr had evolved into the faun, with two goat legs and a human torso. Fauns still had a liking for music but a much calmer demeanor than satyrs and a love of the forest like centaurs, which is assumed to be more in keeping with the original ipotanes.

Though it is hard to pinpoint an original version of the ipotane, certain characteristics can be traced back through accounts of centaurs, fauns, and satyrs. Unfortunately, not all stories could be written down, and not everything recorded could survive for thousands of years. For this reason, the evolution of these legendary creatures highlights how myths and legends were passed down through many generations by verbal storytelling, a

tradition that would keep versions of the ipotane alive, fluidly diverging and converging like a braided river.

Section Six | Aquatic Beasts

It is easy to picture ancient people looking out to sea and wondering what lurks in the unknown depths. Many sea monsters were imagined to explain the dangers of the deep, the sinking of boats, lost sailors, and certain natural phenomena such as tidal waves and tsunamis.

Unpredictable and deadly like the sea, two of the most well-known sea monsters are the Kraken, a giant many-tentacled creature from Scandinavian folklore, and the more whale-like Leviathan from the Hebrew Bible. It was so renowned that the word Leviathan was incorporated into the English language as a noun meaning something very large or powerful.

This section includes creatures that live in bodies of water. Some are amphibious, like the Māori Ponaturi, while others shapeshift to come onto land. The myriad water-dwelling creatures almost universally represent the risk of death by drowning and the idea that there could be something hidden just under the surface. This concept is also said to symbolize the unconscious mind, always present but usually hidden; a monk lustng after the Slavic Rusalka is an excellent example of this.

A body of water does not need to be vast to be dangerous; lakes and rivers can easily lead to drowning, as shown with the Scottish Kelpie. Crocodiles also represent a hidden threat in the water in certain countries and have inspired creatures like Makara in Hindu mythology.

As well as deadly, the sea can be giving and beautiful, like the seal-like selkie folk of Scotland, a heart-breaking exception to the theme of physical peril and destruction posed by other water dwellers.

Chapter 30: Bake-kujira

Origin: Japanese Mythology



Hamma sat on her rocky coastal perch and gazed down at the shallow water of the cove. She looked out to sea and envisioned her father going whaling, dressed in his loincloth and headband. As far as Hamma was concerned, he was fearless and the best swimmer in the village, but that didn't stop her from worrying about him. Returning her gaze to the cove, Hamma saw the splashes of a shoal coming in. Great! she thought, jumping up, preparing to tell her father—they could have fish for dinner! But before she turned away, she saw a large shape under the water; perhaps a whale was following the fish. She ran down the rocky path to the edge of the peninsula to get a closer look.

Sure enough, just below the water's surface was a huge white whale swimming towards the cove. Not only were there fish in front of it but also birds above it, tagging along for a feast. Her stomach rumbled just thinking about it. She would tell her father there was a whale too—everyone could eat well! Just then, the whale came up to breathe, and she squinted to check what she saw: the whale was all bones, with only seawater in between them. Yōkai! Maybe the shoal of fish would be strange like the birds and no good to eat, like the whale, her hopes of a good meal disintegrated. She raced to tell her father. He would know if they should go to the shrine to pray because she had seen Bake-kujira.

The skeletal form of Bake-kujira has no flesh or structure other than white bones, although the creature is animated and moves around like it is alive, even coming up to the surface as if to breathe. Its skull hosts empty eye sockets and, as it is a baleen whale, no teeth. It is said to be accompanied by peculiar fish and birds, no doubt because whales and birds can be witnessed following large shoals of fish for a feeding frenzy in shallow water. While whale carcasses are known to float for a time, they sink as decay sets in, rotting to bones on the seafloor—this implies that other forces are at work in the case of Bake-

kujira. Translated from Japanese, Bake-kujira means 'ghost whale,' although it is sometimes called 'bone whale.'

The popularity of Bake-kujira can be credited to the manga artist Mizuki Shigeru. He was considered a master in the genre of *yōkai* stories and was best known for the manga series *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, which featured Bake-kujira. He was also an expert historian and was inspired by Bake-kujira folklore from his home region.

One rainy evening, an enormous whale was seen from the shore. The men took their fishing boat out to investigate, but the closer they got, the more unusual the situation became. Even though it was difficult to see in the rain and encroaching darkness, the whale was clearly humongous and white. Surrounding the whale were thousands of fish, but even the most experienced fishermen could not recognize them. There were also birds accompanying the whale that no one had ever seen before. It was as if they had sailed into an unknown world.

One man threw a harpoon at the whale, but it went straight through. The whale had no flesh; it was only bones but was swimming nonetheless. The men were unanimously terrified and called off the hunt. The whale turned and swam back out to the deep ocean, the strange birds and fish going with it. The whalers returned to shore, safe but shaken, convinced they must have seen a strange god or the ghost of a whale they had once killed. And though they looked, they never saw it again.

Historically, whale sightings and beached whales were considered an auspicious blessing as they could mean the difference between starvation and prosperity. This led to the traditional saying, 'One whale benefits seven villages.' In ancient Japan, whales were respected and eventually considered the embodiment of Ebisu, the god of abundance, so the limited remains of carcasses were buried in whale mounds and often turned into shrines.

During the Great Tenpo Famine, in 1837, a large whale beached itself next to the whale shrine in the town of Akehama; it saved the whole area from starvation. This was seen as a noble sacrifice, so the whale was given a posthumous Buddhist name as a mark of veneration, a practice usually reserved only for great lords. The name given roughly translates to 'The Great Health-Bringing Whale Scholar of the Universe.'

Modern commentators tend to present the symbolism of Bake-kujira as the antithesis of traditional whaling, so instead of representing food, stability, and prosperity, Bake-kujira is a bad omen for famine, fires, or plagues. Historically, rumors like this were perpetuated by people opposed to whaling, such as Buddhists, to dissuade people from killing these majestic mammals. However, Mizuki Shigeru, perhaps the most direct link to the legend, portrays Bake-kujira differently. In *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, Bake-kujira is depicted as a sea guardian, massive and powerful but kind-natured.

Some sources mention the 'Curse of Bake-kujira,' but this seems to be a term coined by Mizuki Shigeru himself in the 1950s. While working on manga, he said he ate a lot of whale meat and became inexplicably ill; he called it the 'Curse of Bake-kujira.' Thus, the term seems to have been transposed to a time when fishermen were almost certainly worried that the souls of slaughtered whales would become vengeful and return to bring destruction. Ultimately, this is why Bake-kujira has been interpreted as both a scourge-bringer and a protector of the oceans.

Chapter 31: Kelpie

Origin: Scottish Folklore



One evening, a man walking home saw that the river he needed to cross was flooded and too fast-moving for him to do so safely. As he was about to turn around, he saw a gray pony grazing on the river bank. The man approached it; it made no objections to his presence and allowed him to jump up onto its back. He was a confident rider and had quickly decided that this was the perfect way to cross the river and return to his family as planned. However, as soon as he was seated, the horse charged off into the deepest and most turbulent part of the river. By the time the man realized, it was too late: this was no horse; it was a kelpie taking him to his death.

The most common water spirit in Scottish folklore is the kelpie, a type of water horse. It is a shapeshifting aquatic creature that can take the form of a horse or human on land. Kelpies usually show themselves as handsome grey or black horses and possess exceptional strength and stamina. They lurk around bodies of water, usually rivers, that have deep pools for them to inhabit. Their coats are enchanted, so if you touch them, you cannot break free. The most likely candidate for the word origin of kelpie is the Gaelic word *cailpeach*, meaning 'colt,' a young male horse.

Almost every significant body of water in Scotland has an associated kelpie story, and the common theme is that if you get onto their back, you are doomed to drown. The variety of local stories imply a host of different kelpies with a wide range of personalities and characteristics. Some regional variations include a kelpie with serpents in its mane, some with hooves pointing the wrong way, and one that sings to entice you onto its back. It is said you should look out for a dripping wet mane or water weeds in the hair of a kelpie disguised as a person. Kelpies are almost always considered malevolent and said to

prey on humans, leaving only entrails thrown out onto the riverbank

Across Scotland, a tale is told of ten children who unknowingly met a kelpie as they played near a river. Nine of the children climbed onto its back, but the tenth child, a boy, was reluctant. The kelpie wanted all ten children and followed the boy. The young boy, thinking the horse was being friendly, stretched out his arm to gingerly stroke the horse's nose. Immediately his finger became stuck and, as the horse turned, dragging him towards the river with the other children still on its back, he knew it was a kelpie. Shouting to the other children, he quickly took his pocket knife and cut off his own finger to free himself. The other nine children were stuck on the kelpie's back and couldn't get off; they were carried away and drowned, their innards later found on the riverbank.

In contrast to this malicious intent, kelpies are also seen as seeking human companionship, but in most cases, it is probably a pretense to lure people onto their backs to drown them. However, one story shows at least some kelpies are capable of human-like feelings.

There was once a lonely kelpie who had seen a girl he longed to marry. He turned himself into a handsome young man to woo her. The girl, however, recognized him for a kelpie and took his silver necklace while he was sleeping; it was his bridle and the source of his power. Without it, he was forced into his horse shape and put to work on the family farm for a year. Questioning her actions, the young woman took the kelpie to see a wise man. He said she should return the kelpie's silver necklace, which she did, allowing him to resume his human form once more. He professed that he still wanted to marry her, and this time she agreed. The wise man granted the kelpie a mortal life, and they were married.

Gaining control over a kelpie and putting their strength to work does not always have a happy outcome. For example, the Laird of Morphie forced a kelpie to build his home by making it wear a halter with a cross on it. When the Laird's home was finished, he set the kelpie free, but it cursed him, and the Morphie family line died out.

Also related to tack, an ancestor of the MacGregor clan managed to take a kelpie's bridle. Powerless and destined to die within a day without its bridle, the kelpie tried to reclaim it but was outsmarted by MacGregor. Subsequently, the bridle was said to give healing properties to water and was passed down as a family heirloom.

While kelpies in human form are almost always male, in one story, a kelpie appeared as a disgruntled old woman and drowned two people in a river. Despite this, most paintings of kelpies show them as nude waterside maidens, clearly a sizable step away from the catalog of traditional folklore.

The kelpie stories warn people of the danger of flooded rivers, deep pools, and hidden currents. These all present a genuine risk of drowning, and the stories may have originated as an attempt to rationalize both children and adults lost to such tragic accidents. Evolving into cautionary tales, they may have helped keep children away from dangerous waters, as well as young women away from handsome strangers.

Chapter 32: Selkie

Origin: Celtic, Scottish and Norse Folklore



She had looked inside every cupboard, under the beds, in the roof space, any crevices she could think of; it was nowhere to be found. But it must be somewhere! It was too precious to have been thrown away. And it couldn't have been destroyed; she was still here, wasn't she? She sat down dejected. Life was alright here; her husband was a kind man, and she had come to love him, but...

'What were you looking for, Ma'am?' asked her youngest as she sidled up next to her lap.

'I used to have a coat that was, you know... warm for winter,' said the mother sadly, stroking her daughter's hair, 'but I can't find it anywhere.' The child thought for a moment, 'Is it shiny and beautiful?' she asked. Her mother nodded. 'Don't cry, I know where it is!' and the child dashed off into the next room. 'Is it this one, Ma'am?' she asked, returning a few minutes later with a silky smooth, grey sealskin coat. Her mother gasped, 'yes, where did you find it after all this time?'

'I saw Dad putting it under the floorboards one night,' said the child, proffering it to her mother. She took it like it was a treasure and held it to her chest. Putting a gentle hand on her daughter's shoulder, she said, 'I have to go away, tell your Dad and brothers, I love you all, but I have to go.' She got up, clasping her sealskin coat, and headed for the door.

'When are you coming back?' asked the child, misunderstanding.

'Come and visit me at the beach sometimes,' the selkie said over her shoulder, 'I will sing for you.' And with tears rolling down her cheeks, she turned and left.

Tales of the selkie folk, or seal people, stretch from Ireland to Iceland and are concentrated around the Northern Isles of Scotland, Orkney and Shetland. Selkies are miraculous seals, male and female, that can shed their sealskin to take human form on land. They are beautiful, loving creatures with little to no inclination to cause harm. Selkie is the Orcadian word for gray seal, a common sight in the area, basking on rocks, or popping their heads out of the water, with big dark eyes.

In folklore, selkies cannot shed their skin any time they please, only according to certain time constraints, such as once a month, once a year, or every seven years. They must don their sealskin to return to the sea; otherwise, they are forced to stay on land. Regardless of how long they stay ashore, selkies have a deep attachment to the sea. Selkie folklore revolves around a human taking a selkie lover, but it inevitably results in heartbreak as the selkie can't escape their urge to return to the water.

If a lonely human woman seeks the company of a selkie man, she must shed seven tears into the sea at high tide to call a selkie to her. Stories of taking a male selkie lover may have been used to explain pregnancies while protecting the true father's identity, relevant in the small island communities where everyone knows everyone else. For female selkies, the stories may have originated to explain a missing wife and comfort any children left behind.

In Orkney, there was once a handsome young man who was yet to marry, even though the local girls had tried to woo him. One evening he was walking by the beach when he saw several selkies in human form frolicking in the shallows and dancing naked on the shore. He crept closer; he had heard of selkies but never seen them on land before. When they saw him, they snatched up their sealskins and fled to the water. But the last selkie woman was too slow; the young man had snatched up her skin before her. She begged for him to return it, but he could not

bear the thought of her disappearing into the sea; such was her loveliness. He folded up the sealskin and took it—and its owner—home.

They made a happy life together and had several children, but he often saw his selkie wife gazing out to sea with a wistful look in her eye. He could not bear the thought of parting with her and made sure the sealskin was well hidden. However, their children found it one day, and not knowing what it was, gave it to their mother. Once the selkie had the skin in her possession, she returned to the sea, leaving her children and human husband behind, never to be seen again, although the children often saw a seal pop their head up and watch them intently every once in a while.

An interesting candidate for the origin of selkie folklore is Sami kayakers, indigenous people from Scandinavia, or even Inuit who rowed down to Scotland when the ice sheets made the distances more traversable. Their garments and kayaks were covered in sealskin, but as they became waterlogged, they had to be removed and dried out to regain buoyancy. This could have easily given the impression of removing a sealskin to reveal human legs and also given rise to the idea that some selkies were already married.

For these isolated coastal communities, the sea both gives and takes away. To reflect this, selkies symbolize a generous bounty and the heartache of loss. In contrast to other sea-dwelling mythical creatures, selkies are affectionate and gentle, just like the companionable sight of gray seals. So, the next smooth dark head that bobs up out of northern waters may be a missing selkie wife and mother, checking on her family.

Chapter 33: Cetus

Origin: Greek Mythology



A tidal wave had just swept over the land, flattening almost everything in its wake, ripping up trees with ease, and tumbling buildings. From a high vantage point, Makda could see the sea still churning; what looked like a second wave rising up, ready to roll ashore. There was something out there, writing in the sea, and every so often, a large black tail would flick up and crash down, violently disturbing the water. The wave started to rush in towards where the beach used to be. Makda could only look on in horror; there were already so many bodies floating in the water, cows, people.

There was definitely a twisting black shape behind the wave, closer now, urging it on. A long black head rose out of the water to oversee the destruction; it was as if it used its massive body to drive the tidal wave ashore. Big bulging eyes and rows of razor-sharp teeth were visible—it seemed to be cackling at the havoc it heralded. From its vastness, viciousness, and unusual spines down its back, it could only be Cetus.

In Greek mythology, the name Cetus can be given to any large sea monster, and collectively they were called Cetea. Cetus was also the Greek word for any large sea animal, including whales and sharks. A classification of whales, cetaceans, is named after Cetea, and they are also large, fully aquatic, streamlined, and carnivorous.

Of exceptional strength and size, Cetea are said to have had an insatiable appetite, attributed to their vastness, and to be quick to rage. Cetea were loyal to the sea god Poseidon and frolicked around his chariot when he passed by. They were also the mounts and companions of the beautiful sea nymphs, Nereids, but savage Cetea attacks are the most renowned.

The most well-known Cetea were the Ethiopian Cetus, slain by Perseus, and the Trojan Cetus, slain by Hercules. In each

case, the Cetus in question was sent by Poseidon to consume a human sacrifice.

Written accounts featuring Cetea focus on the courageous actions of the heroes rather than describing the sea monsters in detail; however, ancient art can provide insight here. Depictions in 4th – 6th Century BC vase paintings show Cetea with long jaws full of sharp teeth, a long body with fins, and a row of spikes down the back of their neck or whole body. The surviving vase painting of the Ethiopian Cetus appears more serpent-like, whereas the example of the Trojan Cetus is reminiscent of an elongated killer whale.

The myth featuring the Ethiopian Cetus is the most well known because it tells how the hero Perseus met his wife, Andromeda:

In ancient Ethiopia, King Cepheus and Queen Cassiopeia had a beautiful daughter, Princess Andromeda. They were very proud of her, but the queen, in particular, liked to boast about how stunning the princess was. One day Queen Cassiopeia was crowing about how her daughter was even more beautiful than the Nereids when the sea nymphs overheard her. Enraged and offended, the sea nymphs rushed to Poseidon to complain and demand that Queen Cassiopeia be punished for her pride and arrogance. Poseidon agreed that something must be done—he was married to a Nereid after all—and he sent a mighty tidal wave to Ethiopia. The wave alone caused much destruction, but into the floods it had created, Poseidon sent Cetus to devastate the kingdom further. Many lives were lost, and homes and farmland were obliterated.

King Cepheus consulted with an oracle for advice on how to stop this onslaught. The oracle advised him to sacrifice Princess Andromeda to the sea monster to appease Poseidon. The King felt he had little choice and ordered for his daughter to be tied to a rock in the sea; then, they waited for Cetus.

Luckily, at that time, the hero Perseus was on his way home from killing the Gorgon Medusa. As he flew over the sea with his winged sandals and reached the coast of Ethiopia, he saw the beautiful Andromeda chained to a rock. He spoke with her and was moved by her plight, so he quickly sought agreement from her parents that he could marry her if he saved her from Cetus. They hastily agreed, even though she had been betrothed to the King's brother. At that moment, Cetus came, thrashing wildly through the water, snapping his sharp fangs, ready to devour his sacrifice.

In some accounts, Perseus slew the monstrous Cetus with his sword, and in others, he used Medusa's head to turn Cetus to stone. Either way, he destroyed a monster and gained a bride, and Perseus and Andromeda went on to have one of the most trouble-free marriages in Greek mythology.

Thus, Cetus is established as a tool used by the tempestuous sea god Poseidon to dish out his destructive punishments. In the story of the Trojan Cetus, Hercules rescues Hesione, another princess and would-be human sacrifice. Both Greek myths involving Cetus have the classic damsel in distress, with Cetus as the threat to life to be overcome by a daring (male) hero, which reflects the patriarchal society of the era.

Collectively, Cetea represent the dangers of creatures such as whales and sharks while symbolizing the then unknown depths and destructive powers of the ocean.

Chapter 34: Makara

Origin: Hindu Mythology



Under the timid surface of the river, the creature lurked. It was patient, calculating, and hungry. Its long jaws itched to sink their sharp teeth into flesh. Completely submerged, no one would know it was there until it was too late. It took a slow step forward along the riverbed, each clawed foot sinking into soft mud. There were splashes as legs got into the river, some stood still, some were cavorting around, and distorted playful shouts travelled through ripples. A line of soapy suds floated overhead from clothes being washed. Any moment, some unsuspecting innocent would step closer, and Makara would gorge on fresh meat.

Makara is the Sanskrit word for 'sea creature' and the origin of the English word 'mugger,' which is also Hindi for crocodile, reflecting how crocodiles hunt. The gharial, one of the types of crocodiles found in the river Ganges, is the likely source of inspiration for Makara because it has an unusually shaped snout, having a lumpy protrusion at the end of its nose.

Makara is a hybrid creature composed of animals representing air, fire, water, and earth to embody creativity. It is most often depicted with a fish or dolphin-like body, the front paws of a lion, and long crocodile jaws ending in a short elephant's trunk, curled upwards. The tail is either fish or peacock-like. Religious sculptors add that Makara should have the ears of a pig and eyes like a monkey.

In architecture and temple iconography, Makara is shown in its traditional hybrid glory, but in some folklore art, Makara is displayed simply as a crocodile, as hybrid creatures fell out of favor. Many artistic depictions show that Makara acts as a water vehicle for the gods. The river goddess Ganga, the deity of the Ganges, and Varuna, god of the sea, are usually mounted on Makara. Several gods, including Shiva and Vishnu, can be seen wearing Makara-shaped earrings. In heraldry, Makara is the

insignia for the god of love, Kamadeva. The Karava people of Sri Lanka, a remnant from an ancient caste system, also have a ceremonial Makara flag.

Though not a prominent character in literature, Makara is the most widespread creature depicted in Hindu and Buddhist temples throughout India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Cambodia, Nepal, and Tibet. It is a common feature in decorative arches that surround deity sculptures, gateways, and entryways into sacred rooms. Makara can often be found at the foot of an archway, with their head pointed upward; the arch pillar comes out of Makara's mouth on one side, rises over the archway, and descends into the mouth of the second Makara on the other side of the arch. In this respect, Makara is seen as a protective guardian, but their fierce nature that makes them effective in this role is often overlooked.

Just like crocodiles appearing suddenly to snatch a life away, Makara represents chaos. In Hinduism, chaos is considered necessary; creation and order arise from disorder and eventually return to it, just like the decorative arch coming from one Makara and ending at another.

Such Makara arches (*Makara-torana*) are ubiquitous in Sri Lanka in both temples and ancient royal architecture. The Sri Lankan Karava people, mentioned above, have a traditional story that shows the nature of Makara:

At the behest of his wife, King Aditi was absolving himself in the holy waters of the river Ganges, praying to the god Shiva for a child. Shiva's wife, Umayal, was so moved by King Aditi's prayers that she pleaded with Shiva to fulfill them. Shiva transformed his wife into a baby and sent her floating down the Ganges in a small boat. To prevent the boat from floating past the King, Shiva instructed Makara, who could not refuse, to guide it.

With the help of Makara, the boat reached King Aditi, and when he heard the baby's cries, he knew their prayers had been answered. He took the child home in his arms and, overjoyed, he and his wife, Queen Arunavally, named her Somadanti, of the great waves.

As Makara had finished his obligation, he began to cause chaos. Worsening over the years, he stirred up the deep waters and caused waves that shattered boats to smithereens. The subjects of the kingdom, in increasing distress, laid their problems before King Aditi. When his daughter Somadanti was grown, he proclaimed that, in the name of Shiva, the hero who ensnared Makara would have his daughter's hand in marriage.

Disguised as a sage, Shiva went down to the kingdom. He transformed sacred texts into a net and brought down the crescent moon to make a golden vessel. Deities came from the heavens to sing, and flowers fell from the sky. Makara beheld the glorious event and contemplated release from his cursed behavior. Joyfully, Makara drew water into his massive jaws and spat out a fountain so high it bathed the heavens.

When Shiva cast the net, Makara felt its sacredness on his body and tamely submitted with no resistance, allowing himself to be caught. Makara blissfully floated to shore and was released from his cursed behavior, which conferred prosperity and plenty upon the kingdom. And Shiva, having successfully ensnared Makara, gained the hand of Somadanti, who was his wife Umayal, in marriage.

This story of Makara's ensnarement highlights how religious teachings were revered as something that could free people from their destructive impulses. It emphasized the power of the gods that such a creature would happily succumb to their wishes: the gods must indeed rule over everything if they can so easily tame Makara, the crocodile of chaos.

Chapter 35: Ponaturi
Origin: Māori FOLKLORE



Kaia was looking forward to getting home to cook the mushrooms she had found, but she was growing concerned that it was getting dark so early. It didn't help that it was so overcast and misty. A flicker of movement between the rocks caught her eye, and she looked towards the beach. Just a shadow, she told herself and increased her pace. Between another pair of boulders, she saw it again before it darted away, a pale figure, the size of a child, with shaggy blond hair. Oh god, they are out early tonight, she thought. Maybe they would leave her alone. But another face, with bright blue eyes, leered at her around the next rock, and she broke into a run. She had heard what happened if you got abducted, and she urged her legs to go faster.

There was no one to call out to for help, so she saved her breath and ran, not stopping to look back, sure that more than one would be following her. Breathing hard, she reached her home and barged into the kitchen. Please be an ember, please be an ember, she prayed as she charged to the hearth. She pushed the half-burned firewood further into the gray-white ash and blew with her remaining breath. A fiery spark burst forth and rekindled the cooking fire, and Kaia, relieved beyond measure, quickly added more sticks. She couldn't yet bring herself to look out of the window in case pale faces were looking back. She knew she was safe from them now, but it had been a close call with the Ponaturi.

In New Zealand, there are unfriendly and secretive Patupaiarehe fairies that live in the forests, mountains, and oceans. The amphibious type is called Ponaturi; they live primarily in an underwater realm but also come onto the land to look for raw food. They loathe both fire and sunlight, which are anathemas to them; they are also revolted by the smell of cooked food. For these reasons, they are nocturnal, though they may also be active when it is very misty. They may sleep underwater or on land as long as their home is kept sufficiently dark.

They live in social groups in the same way that people do, but they are hostile to trespassers. They are known to beat, mistreat, or even kill intruders, and red-headed or albino Māori were said to be the children of women who had been abducted by Patupaiarehe.

Ponaturi, like all Patupaiarehe, have pale human-like features, are often described as small in stature, have red or fair hair, and long claws. Alternatively, some Māori stories portray them as being much taller than people. Unlike the Māori, Patupaiarehe are never tattooed, and due to their appearance and disposition, they can be thought of as goblins.

In Māori tribal culture, the expert storyteller memorizes oral literature as genealogies, poetry, and narrative prose to be passed from generation to generation. Pre-European Māori had not developed a writing system, so they used these methods to keep their mythology alive. Incidentally, Europeans with pale skin and fair hair were thought to resemble the Patupaiarehe.

Māori is an excellent example of fluid storytelling, with different variations between tribes, storytellers, and retellings by the same storyteller. No interpretation is more correct than another, and a personalized experience for the listeners was created.

There was once a tribal chief called Rua-pupuke who lived by the sea. His young son had recently drowned, and grief-stricken, he was determined to retrieve his son's body. One night, he swam down, down, down under the waves. While swimming, he saw an underwater building and went to investigate. When he reached it, he saw that it was a house covered in intricate carvings and above the door was a carving with the likeness of his son.

The house was empty except for a woman who worked as the doorkeeper. She explained to Rua-pupuke that it was the

home of the Ponaturi, and they had turned his son into a carving when he accidentally trespassed on their territory. She had a fondness for children and so informed Rua-pupuke that the Ponaturi would return before sunrise to sleep because they couldn't survive in the sunlight.

The next day, Rua-pupuke returned to the Ponaturi house in the underwater realm. The doorkeeper nodded; the Ponaturi were all asleep inside. She stepped aside, and Rua-pupuke threw open all of the doors and windows. The Ponaturi all perished, except two who escaped and fled. Rua-pupuke took the carving of his son and some other carved pieces of wood back to the surface, and they were used as patterns, thus introducing wood carving to his tribe.

Patupaiarehe provide a cause for red-headed and albino Māori children, and Ponaturi, as with other mythical water creatures, offer an explanation for drowning. Patupaiarehe stories were also used as a warning for children to prevent them from straying far from the safety of the village or into deep water. When new skills were acquired, like wood carving and weaving fishing nets, the source of this otherworldly knowledge was often attributed to the secretive and mysterious Ponaturi.

Conclusion

In every culture throughout history, myths, folktales, and legends populated with fantastical creatures were told to educate and entertain. These stories helped people attribute meaning and order to an otherwise chaotic and often dangerous, pre-science world. The role of myth, folklore, and legend was to explain the unknown, provide cautionary tales that warned against dangers, promote moral virtues, and offer spiritual messages to give a sense of hope and purpose.

As suggested in the introduction to this book, creatures may represent the actual animal they resemble, a force or element of nature, or things about ourselves as humans. For example, Arion, from Greek mythology, was the archetypal horse, fast and brave. The sea monster Cetus, from Greek mythology, represented the potential violence of the ocean. Ipotanes, specifically the Satyrs, represented hedonism, overindulgence, and a lack of moral virtue.

We have seen that creatures and gods represent the duality of human nature and that even the gods, who represent the virtues of humans, have bestial qualities. We have met many beasts, hybrids, and shapeshifters from cultures around the world, and some striking similarities are now apparent. Some stories from different parts of the world are very similar such as the cautionary tale not to ride an unknown horse. In both the Scottish Kelpie and the French Cheval Mallet folktales, the horse bolts, and the rider dies, commonly by drowning.

Thus, the categories of creatures often have common themes across cultures:

Arthropods have a wide range of representations depending on the perceived characteristics of the creature; they can be seen as a source of mischief and malice or creativity and knowledge. Ants, for example, are considered hardworking and industrious, like the Myrmidons of Greek mythology. Spiders are prevalent in myth, folktale, and legend and are often portrayed as dangerous due to potentially venomous spider bites. For example, Tsuchigumo and Jorogumo are both deadly spiders from Japanese folklore. However, Arachne is associated with weaving in Greek mythology, and Anansi, from African mythology, is an intelligent trickster.

Birds, especially birds of prey, are shown as majestic protectors, a prevalent theme in Hindu mythology, exemplified by Garuda, Gandaberunda, and Jatayu. Birds are often used to highlight human values; for example, the Norse ravens Hugin and Munin represent knowledge, the kite Jatayu represents bravery and self-sacrifice, and the Japanese hybrid Itsumade calls for respect for the suffering and death of others.

Wolves and dogs are almost always associated with power and death because of their ferocious predatory nature. For example, the multi-headed dogs Orthrus and Cerberus from Greek mythology are the particularly aggressive opponents of heroes. The giant and vicious wolves Fenrir and Amarok from Norse and Inuit mythology are also violent killers. However, the she-wolf Amarok does have a much more complex character with a nurturing side visible in some stories.

Snakes, like wolves, represent power and death due to the threat they pose to human life, especially significant in ancient times when people lived closer to animals. Some of the most fearsome monsters were serpents or part-serpent. For example, we have seen the multi-headed Yamata no Orochi from Japanese mythology who claims human sacrifices. There is also the mighty Typhon with serpent coils for legs from Greek

mythology, whose sole aim was to overthrow the gods of Olympus. Similarly, the humongous serpent Jörmungandr from Norse mythology surrounded the whole of Midgard and would play a part in the downfall of the gods.

Ungulates, particularly horses, represent speed, freedom, and bravery because they allowed travel and gave an advantage in battle. Important mounts for heroes, prophets, and angels were Arion, Buraq, and Haizum, exemplifying loyal service and often purity. In other horses, their speed made them deadly, as seen with the lethal water Kelpie and Cheval Mallet.

Aquatic creatures are most often used to represent the natural forces of the sea and other bodies of water. They may offer explanations for natural phenomena, like the Greek Cetus and Norse Jörmungandr do for tidal waves and tsunamis. Aquatic creatures are also commonly used to explain drowning, as in the Slavic Rusalka, Scottish Kelpie and Selkie, and the Māori Ponaturi, all of whom can drag you underwater. The Selkie-folk are capable of drowning people as revenge, but most Selkie stories are more comforting, a way to explain drowning by saying the lost person has turned into a seal and returned to their natural home.

Some stories tell us about the nature of animals themselves, such as Makara from Hindu mythology, a hybrid inspired by the gharial, exemplifies the nature of crocodiles, lurking under the surface, ready to strike. Other stories tell us about natural phenomena. In ancient Greece, volcanic activity was attributed to Typhon's entrapment under Mount Etna, causing eruptions when he tried to escape. In the Philippines, there are two particularly exquisite examples in the stories of Bakunawa, attempting to eat the last moon causing lunar eclipses, and in the story of Anggitay, we are told why rainbows appear after the rain.

The majority of the stories that have been recorded have something to say about human behavior, highlighting what is

virtuous and what is a vice or folly. For example, gold is typically linked to greed. The metal-eating bird Alicanto from Chilean legend, Fafnir the gold hoarding dragon, and Anggitay the gold-seeking horse-woman hybrid warn of greed and the perils of a self-serving attitude. They all illustrate how greed brings suffering and will lead you astray. Alicanto may lead you off a cliff to your death, Fafnir is consumed by misery and isolated from his family, and Anggitay spends her days chasing gold that is only an illusion.

Many stories provide cautionary tales, and some are directed particularly at children or their parents, reminding them to keep a watchful eye on their surroundings. Lamia, from Greek mythology, preys on children, devouring them, though in later poetry it is men; Sigbin's favorite delicacy is the heart of a child in Filipino folklore. Water Kelpies, from Scottish folklore, particularly like to take children on their backs to their underwater abodes, and in Māori culture, children were told not to stray far or the Ponaturi would get them.

There are many other creatures left to explore and other countries and cultures that have not been covered in this book. Hopefully, you will be inspired to find out more about some of these cultures or creatures, or uncover some new ones. I really hope people will continue to record, translate, and share their traditional stories for everyone to enjoy and benefit from. It is the retelling that keeps the stories—and their creatures—alive in our imaginations so they will not be forgotten.

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Note from the Author:

None of this work would have been possible without the wealth of knowledge that already exists out there. I, Zayden Stone, hope to be able to add to the wealth of references for all future folklorists. To write this book, I have spent hours carefully going through different sources. And with that I'd like to remind the reader, that a non-fiction book is always a result of best efforts. Mythologies and folktales present an interesting opportunity where stories have multiple renditions based on the author. So I hope the reader absorbs this book in the same vein - a perspective and not an absolute truth.

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About the Author

Zayden Stone is a self proclaimed folklorist. As a child, while he watched his cousins and friends play with action figurines, he was swallowed up by the world of mythology. He let the stories of ancient cultures transport him to an imaginary world where magical beasts roamed the planet freely. He would often re-imagine these stories told from the perspective of these mythical creatures and would wonder what they would have had to say.

It has been a life long dream of Zayden's to combine all the creatures that he has grown up reading about, into a comprehensive illustrated guide for others to read. This book is an ode to his own childhood and fascination for ancient tales.

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About the Artist

Herdhian is a freelance Graphic Designer and illustrator based in Indonesia. He has always loved to draw, whether by hand or digitally. He has a special interest in illustrating dark art characters because he feels that he can pour his emotions into it. When not drawing, he is busy being the IT Support at a school.